

# THE ARGOSY.

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## COLONEL FANE'S SECRET.

BY SYDNEY HODGES.

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### CHAPTER X.

#### COLONEL FANE'S SECRET.

THE Colonel had always been a punctual man. Called at eight, breakfast at nine, lunch at one-thirty, dinner at seven; all lights out and bed at ten-thirty. The last law was as rigid as those of the Medes and Persians. Vera's mother had died when she was quite a child and for years she had been so accustomed to these regulations that she would have thought something was going wrong with the universe if they were infringed.

The Colonel breakfasted at the usual hour in their London lodgings, but he had generally lunched at his club since they had left the Lindsays'. He could not afford to keep up his membership at the well-known military clubs. He had therefore joined a new club; a sort of caravansary where country members were admitted on very easy terms, and where a good luncheon could be had at a remarkably moderate price.

Punctually as clockwork he returned to the lodgings at half-past six to prepare for dinner, and Vera was always at home to welcome him.

On the day described in the last chapter, she had been more than usually depressed. The autumn was approaching and still the Colonel gave no sign of returning home. Hugh had written to her from every port they touched at, but on this day she had been disappointed, for even the P. and O. steamers must submit to the caprices of wind and weather.

"If we could only get away from this dreadful London," she sighed, "anything would be better than this."

Our prayers for the future are sometimes answered in a way that makes us wish we had never uttered them. It is better to be contented with the present.

Half-past six came, but the Colonel did not make his appearance. Seven o'clock, but still he had not arrived. Vera rang the bell.

The maid appeared in answer to the summons.

"Will you ask Mrs. King to be kind enough to put back the dinner a little. My father has not come in?"

"Yes, miss."

Half-past seven came, and then Mrs. King herself came up.

"What shall I do, miss? The fish will all be spoilt."

"I am very sorry, Mrs. King, I can't think where my father can be. I suppose you can keep the steak warm?"

"Oh yes, miss, but it will not be so nice. The Colonel is generally so very punctual."

"Yes, I can't imagine what is keeping him. I am beginning to be anxious, for he was not looking at all well this morning."

"Indeed he was not, miss; King noticed it as he was going out. 'The Colonel don't look himself,' he said."

"I am afraid he is worried about some business matters, but he hopes to get things settled in a few days."

Another half-hour passed and Mrs. King again appeared.

"You must have something yourself, miss," she said. "Will you let me bring the dinner up?"

"Oh no, thank you, I couldn't eat anything; I am really too anxious!"

"Then let me make you some tea, miss."

"Well, yes, thank you, I think I could take some tea."

This feminine panacea for all earthly cares was soon brought, and had its usual comforting effect. Then Vera sat on as the hours went by utterly at a loss to understand what could have detained her usually punctual father to such a late hour. She tried to amuse herself with a book but could not keep her thoughts on it. The anxiety about her father added to the depression of the day was too much for her. Her mind grew full of gloomy forebodings. Eleven o'clock struck and still there was no Colonel. She rang the bell again, and again the landlady appeared.

"I really do not know what to do, Mrs. King, I must not keep you up. I will let my father in if you will trust me to fasten the door."

"Oh no, miss, me and King will sit up for another hour or two. I think you had better go to bed, miss, you look terrible tired."

"I am more anxious than tired. It is so unlike my father. But I cannot go to bed. I must sit up till he comes."

Two more anxious hours passed and then Vera was induced to try and get some sleep on the understanding that the landlord would sit up for at least an hour or two. She was so worn out with mental fatigue that she almost instantly fell asleep. When she awoke it was broad daylight, and on looking at her watch, she found it was half-past seven. She knew Mrs. King was an early riser so she rang the bell. In a few minutes the landlady appeared.

"Has my father returned?" she inquired eagerly.

"No, miss, we have heard nothing of him. King sat up till three and then thought it useless waiting any longer."

"What can have happened?" exclaimed Vera in a fever of anxiety. "It must be some accident; and yet in that case we should have heard by this time."

She knew the Colonel's club, and the thought occurred to her that she would go there and inquire if they had heard anything of him. She dressed speedily, and swallowing a cup of tea which Mrs. King insisted on her having, she was soon on her way.

On her arrival at the club the hall-porter came down to her, and on seeing her anxious state and learning her errand, made diligent inquiries. It was all to no purpose. None of the officials then on duty had seen anything of the Colonel for some days.

Vera sank back in the cab utterly bewildered. She knew not where to turn or what to do; she was in entire ignorance with regard to her father's city friends and acquaintances. There was nothing therefore but to return to the lodgings.

All this time she was weighed down by a presentiment of evil such as she had never before experienced. On arriving at the lodgings she had hardly strength to mount the steps; but before she reached the door it was opened by Mrs. King, whose face was so white and scared that a deadly terror seized Vera as she looked at her.

"You have heard something!" she gasped. "Oh, tell me what it is!"

Mrs. King passed her arms round her in a motherly kind of way.

"Come in here, miss," she said, leading Vera to her own sitting-room. Vera sank into an easy-chair.

"For heaven's sake, don't keep me in suspense!" she said. "I see by your face something dreadful has happened. Is he dead?"

Mrs. King seemed struggling to articulate.

"Oh, my poor young lady, it is too true!" she said. "He was seized with a fit last night and taken to the hospital where he died. A messenger from the hospital is here."

Vera fell upon her knees and bowed her head upon a chair, her face buried in her hands.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she sobbed.

The sudden desolation of her position seemed almost to deprive her of reason. Although the Colonel had never been a particularly affectionate father, she had trusted to him in everything and loved him as far as his nature would admit of love. It was impossible to realise that the one in whom she had always trusted, to whom she had always turned, was taken from her and that she was left absolutely alone.

Mrs. King put her arms about her and tried to draw her towards her, but she rose up with a sudden calm.

"Oh, let me see him! Is he here?" she said.

"No, miss. He died at the hospital in the night. They found a letter on him addressed here, and they sent here to make inquiries."

"Let me see the messenger at once."

The man came in and told his story—told it as mercifully as he could. The Colonel had been suddenly taken ill at an hotel near the hospital. He had been brought to the hospital in a comatose state, from which he never rallied, and had died in the early hours of the morning. The letter found on him had not been addressed to the lodgings but to his club, and at the club they only knew his country address. Fortunately a member happened to come in who knew his town address; but all this had caused delay.

Vera sat listening to this with white and rigid face. Presently she rose up.

"Let me go to him at once," she said. She put her hand in Mrs. King's. "You will go with me," she added; "I have no one but you."

"Certainly, if I may, my dear. I could not bear you to go alone."

The first encounter with death is an ordeal we must all go through, but it is a painful one to the young, especially when the still face we gaze upon is the face of one we have loved and trusted. The feeling of utter desolation which filled Vera's heart when she gazed on the face of her dead father cannot be told in words.

But presently that merciful stagnation of feeling which comes in desperate crises like this began to steal over her heart. The necessity for action, the consideration of what she must do took possession of her thoughts. There were certain things that must be done, and she had to face the question as to how she was to do them. To whom was she to turn for help? Her friend Mrs. Lindsay was travelling on the Continent, and she did not even know her address. Even the Fortescues were away, and there were no other friends in town to whom she could appeal. She was in total ignorance of her father's pecuniary position, and she had not even the means of paying the necessary expenses of his funeral. In her extremity she thought of their old servant in Jersey, and it was with almost a sigh of relief that she begged Mrs. King to telegraph to her to come at once.

There was one obvious duty which must be faced at once—that was to examine her father's desk to ascertain if there were any papers which would enlighten her as to her present position. The keys found on the Colonel had been given to her, and in company with Mrs. King she proceeded to open the desk the Colonel always carried about with him. Almost the first thing that met her gaze was a large sealed envelope addressed to herself in her father's handwriting, and underneath the address were these words: "This paper is on no account to be opened until after my death."

With a trembling hand Vera broke the seal. The writing within covered three or four sheets of letter-paper, but the first words riveted



her attention. Seeing how anxious she looked, Mrs. King withdrew to a distance, and Vera seating herself by the table began the perusal of the document. It was as follows :

"MY DARLING CHILD—When these words meet your eye I shall be no more, for I have written on the envelope a strict injunction that it is not to be opened until after my death. The secret herein revealed I had intended carrying with me to the grave, but on consideration I can see no harm in your knowing it when I have passed away.

"Your dear mother, whom you scarcely remember, was of noble birth. She was the only daughter of the old Lord Seagrove. In a manner scarcely less than miraculous and unknown to the family, after her supposed death, I brought her back to life, married her, and had many years of happiness with her. We had other children besides yourself, but they died in infancy. We were all in all to each other. We lived abroad until after her father's death, then we went to our quiet home at St. Brelade's, where she died. Her death was a terrible blow to me, and I grew indifferent to life. Afterwards, I regret to confess, I sought relief and excitement in speculation; speculation leading to disastrous losses, which have seriously crippled my fortune, but which, however, I yet hope to retrieve, so as to leave you comfortably provided for.

"The present Lord Seagrove is your uncle—now a hard old man. His youngest son is, I believe, the very Mr. Colborne who was mixed up with your theatricals. He is your cousin, and, in the event of his brother's death, would come into the title. All this is, no doubt, very startling to you, and at times I feel that I ought perhaps to have revealed it to you before, but I felt that it might be a disturbing influence over our lives. The particulars are only known to our old servant and to one other.

"Now mark me. In the left hand lower drawer of my writing-table at St. Brelade's, of which I enclose the key, you will find a paper containing a minute account of the marvellous way in which your mother's life was preserved. It is drawn up and signed by myself and my friend, Captain John Watson, who was in my regiment and was my most intimate friend. Incredible as the statement may appear, it is absolutely true, as Watson can bear witness. I have lost sight of him for some years, but I believe him to be still alive. Both the old lord and the present one were always fiercely opposed to any intercourse between your mother and myself. My means were always very limited, and they considered me far beneath them in social position—between them they almost killed your poor mother. I leave you free to make known the facts, and to claim relationship with them if you choose, but I do not advise it. If, in any emergency, you should be driven to do so the attested statement will be of value in proving your claim, and, at any rate, an

irrefutable proof would exist in an inspection of the coffin in the vault which is supposed to contain your mother's remains. As, however, you have not yet read the paper, these words must be an enigma to you, so I will stop.

"May God bless and keep you, my beloved child.

"Your loving father,

"REGINALD FANE."

Enclosed within this paper was a smaller sheet, with a much later date. It contained the following :

"I have brought the foregoing document to London with me, as I do not wish it to be out of my possession. Life is uncertain, and I wish it at all times to be accessible to my dear child. I am, by the advice of an experienced friend, Mr. Sharpe of Tokenhouse Yard, about to embark my little capital in an enterprise, which, I am assured, will retrieve my ill-luck of the past few years within a very few weeks. I trust and believe it will do so on account of my child, for the small annuity I have dies with me. I leave with this a small sum in my desk in case of emergencies.—R. F."

## CHAPTER XI.

### A MEETING IN THE PARK.

VERA slowly folded up the letter, placed it in the open drawer before her, and for a long time sat, not only cast down with grief, but utterly bewildered by the extraordinary revelation contained in her father's last words. In spite of the isolation, which had come upon her with such startling suddenness, she at once made up her mind that nothing but extreme necessity should ever induce her to make herself known to those heartless members of her mother's family, who would have driven her to her death but for an accident, which, to use her father's words, was so remarkable that it amounted almost to a miracle. The strange part of it was that she had already encountered one of the family in the person of the Hon. Tom Colborne, but it was most unlikely that they could ever meet again, and by this time, she reflected, he had probably forgotten her existence. Little did she think that he was yet to exercise an important influence on her career.

She felt the necessity, however, for present action. She proceeded, therefore, to examine her father's desk to ascertain the amount of her present resources. The sum was small enough. After the funeral expenses were paid, there would be barely sufficient to keep her even for a few weeks. Of course, she knew nothing of the amounts her father had invested. This she would have to ascertain from the friend the Colonel mentioned in his last paper.

It was weary work to have to consider all this in the midst of her

bitter grief ; but there was no relation to help her, and it had to be done. After all, the necessity for this attention to petty details in the midst of a great grief may be a merciful dispensation to prevent our falling into a very Slough of Despond ; to prevent our brooding over our grief until reason itself almost forsakes us.

Meanwhile the answer to her telegram had arrived from Jersey. It was as follows :—

“Greatly shocked—too ill to come. Come here as soon as you can.”

This was another trial added to her already heavy burthen of grief. However there was nothing to be done but to submit. She knew her old servant, who had been like a mother to her, would have come at once if it had been at all in her power, and she well knew what she must suffer in being obliged to refuse at such a time. With a heavy heart she sat down and wrote a long letter, giving as many particulars as she could summon courage to narrate, and promising to come at the earliest possible moment. Indeed, the thought of returning to Jersey and to her old friend was her only consolation in this hour of darkness and misery.

Happily she was relieved from all trouble with regard to the funeral by the kindness of the landlady and her husband. She had explained to them how limited her present resources were, and she could not find it in her heart to pay the necessary visit to the city before the last sad rites were over. Mr. King therefore arranged for the quiet funeral on a most economical scale, and both he and his wife accompanied the bereaved girl on the last sad journey to the cemetery.

As soon as she had sufficiently rallied from the prostration that followed Vera sought an interview with the friend named in the Colonel's paper. Here however a fresh shock awaited her, for she was met by the intelligence that the whole of her father's small fortune had been swept away. In despair, she sought the lawyer who she knew had been employed by her father for many years. He proved to be kind and sympathetic, and on learning the state of the case he volunteered to carry out the few legal formalities involved by the Colonel's death free of any expense.

With a still sadder heart she returned to her lodgings. She was indeed thrown on her own resources. With the exception of the small sum she had in hand, and the money which she might raise by the sale of the furniture in Jersey, she had literally nothing. She would have to work for her living, and for this she felt that she was totally unfitted. Oh ! if Hugh could only be by her side to help her in this terrible strait ! She wrote a long letter to him, but she knew that it must be months before she could receive any answer. It was the same with the Lindsays, who, she heard, were extending their trip to Egypt, so that there was literally no one to help her.

She was impatient to start for Jersey, and she arranged to leave a

few days after her interview with the lawyer. The evening before her departure was unusually fine for the time of year, and she resolved to take a turn in Kensington Gardens. Seeking a somewhat retired spot near the Long Water, she sat mechanically watching a gentleman who was amusing himself by sending a fine dog into the water, just as Hugh had been doing on that lovely morning which seemed to her such ages ago, when she had first met him on the beach at St. Brelade's. She became so absorbed in the thoughts of all that had happened since—of all the happiness, and all the misery she had undergone, that she was unconscious of the approach of the owner of the dog, until a voice that seemed familiar startled her from her musings.

"Miss Fane, if I am not mistaken," said the gentleman, raising his hat as he approached.

The man of all others that she would have most wished to avoid at that moment was before her in the person of the Hon. Tom Colborne—her cousin.

It was impossible to avoid him. He held out his hand, and without absolute rudeness she could not refuse it; but her agitation could not be concealed. He looked at her in surprise, and then noticing her deep mourning he said:

"I fear you are in trouble. Forgive my thrusting myself upon you at such a time, but I have been out of town and have heard nothing of my friends for some weeks. I hope it is no sudden loss."

"It is my father," answered Vera, controlling her voice as well as she was able.

"Indeed! I am deeply grieved to hear it. May I offer you my sincerest sympathy?"

The genuine kindness of his tone had the contrary effect to what was intended. She quite broke down. He went on:

"Let me beg of you to forgive me. I would not for the world have obtruded, had I known. But you seem quite alone. I know your friends the Lindsays are abroad. Will you think me very presumptuous if I ask if I can be of service to you in any way?"

His offer was evidently kindly meant. She could not but feel grateful.

"Thank you, no," she answered. "My arrangements are all made. I leave for Jersey to-morrow evening."

"Indeed. To remain there?" he persisted.

"Yes—that is—I am not sure. My future is very uncertain."

Mr. Colborne seemed lost in deep thought.

"Have you relations there?" he suddenly asked.

"No, none," Vera answered sadly, "only a very faithful old servant who is unfortunately ill. I am going to her for a time—that is until I can find some occupation."

It slipped out unconsciously. Mr. Colborne looked up quickly as the words were uttered and again relapsed into thought.

"But it is getting quite late," Vera went on. "I must be returning. I will wish you good-night."

Thoughts of the past came rushing in upon her like a flood. Her father's words came back to her with redoubled force :

"I leave you free to make acquaintance with them if you choose but I do not advise it."

In spite of the apparent kindness of his tone she was anxious to get away. She was, moreover, angry with herself for having made known to him her necessitous condition. She rose, and put out her hand as if to end the interview, but he was not to be shaken off.

"You must at least allow me to see you as far as the gate," he said.

She could not well refuse, and they walked on in silence for a few minutes. Suddenly he said :

"Miss Fane, will you do me a favour?"

She was somewhat taken by surprise.

"Certainly, if I can," she said.

"Will you let me have your address, and allow me to write to you before you leave?"

"With what object?" she asked, a little proudly.

"I wish to make a proposition to you. There is no time to go into it now, and it would hardly be fair to spring it abruptly on you in the midst of your trouble; but it may be for our mutual benefit, and you will have time to think over it while you are in Jersey. But I see I surprise you."

"I am certainly at a loss to know what you can propose that will be for our mutual benefit."

"Allow me to submit the project to you, at any rate. You need not notice it if you do not approve. At least give me your address."

She was to depart the next evening, so she saw no harm in granting his request. She gave the address of her lodgings, and put out her hand.

This time he took it.

"I am glad to have seen you," he said. "Remember, if I can be of use to you at any time, I shall only be too happy. This address will always find me."

He put a card into her hand and raised his hat. It was still daylight and there were plenty of people about, so she had no need of an escort for the short distance she had to go.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye," he answered. "I hope we may soon meet again."

The next moment he had left her and she pursued her way home alone.

The Hon. Tom Colborne had a pleasant and persuasive tongue. He was not much over thirty, he was good-looking and possessed all the vivacity and *savoir faire* which usually results from high birth and familiarity with the best society. His views of women, however, were peculiar. Perhaps those he had encountered through life had not been of a kind to impress him very favourably with regard to their high moral qualities, and he looked upon them all as fair game. He had sufficient tact, however, to conceal his real opinion of the

sex, and treated them with a deference which usually enabled him to get his own way with them in the end. As for principle, it was a thing that never troubled him. He was a younger son, was impecunious, and had to make his own way in the world. He was indifferent as to his methods so long as they did not involve absolute dishonour. Like the Quaker, with regard to money, he was determined to get on—honestly, if he could—but to get on.

Before noon the next day the following letter reached Vera.

“ — Club. Nov. 6, 18—.

“DEAR MISS FANE—I should not have ventured to make the following proposition at a time like this, but for a chance remark of yours with reference to your wishing to find some occupation. Of course I know nothing of your circumstances, and the remark came upon me as a surprise. I may say at once, however, that you have been constantly in my mind ever since the theatricals at Mrs. Fortescue's, and I have frequently wished that I could secure your services for a project I have in view. You know how highly I thought of your performance on the night in question. You have evidently a natural gift for acting which only needs a little training to lead to distinction in the profession; that is if you care to employ your talents in that way. You probably know that for some years past I have been occupying myself in superintending amateur performances of all kinds and have myself acted a good deal with professionals. I am obliged to make myself independent in some way, and I thought this was a very legitimate way of employing what little talent I possess in the histrionic line. I am now aiming at something better than amateur work. I have secured the provincial rights of an excellent piece—a London success; and I intend taking out a company after Christmas to try my luck as a manager. I have secured my leading lady, but I want a second to play a young girl's part—the *ingénue* in fact.

“It would be the greatest satisfaction to me if I could induce you to accept this engagement. I am sure you would succeed. There would be plenty of time for a little preliminary study of stage business, etc., and the part is not difficult. I could offer you a salary which would enable you to live comfortably, and you would be saved all further trouble of looking for some occupation.

“I will not trouble you to answer this at once. No doubt the offer will come upon you as a surprise, but you can think it over while you are in Jersey and let me know at this address in the course of a few weeks. Forgive me if I have pained you in making this proposition while your grief is yet so fresh. Believe me, it is my anxiety to secure your services which prompts me to do so.

“With much sympathy. Believe me,

“Yours very sincerely,

“T. H. COLBORNE.”



Amazement was the first feeling that filled Vera's breast on reading this letter. It was followed by a slight feeling of indignation that he should think for a moment that she would accept such an engagement under him of all men in the world. Then she reflected that after all, he was desirous of doing her a good turn. His letter was couched in such terms that it made it appear that her acceptance of the offer would be conferring a favour on him rather than a benefit on herself. After all why should she feel indignant? He was quite unaware of the relationship that existed between them, and was evidently actuated by a desire to serve her as well as himself.

She folded the letter carefully and put it in her pocket. She had no present intention of accepting the offer. In fact, in spite of what Mr. Colborne had said, she felt quite unfitted for the post he offered. At the same time there was a lurking feeling of relief at the thought that here at least was a means of gaining a livelihood such as she had never dreamed of; and probably if the man who had made the offer had not been one of the family who, according to her father's account, had almost driven her mother to her death, she might have been induced to give the offer more favourable consideration.

It was well into the winter days before Vera had wound up her affairs in Jersey. With what a sickening of the heart she had broken up her hitherto happy home may well be imagined. How the parting from each of her little household treasures had been so many separate wrenches, and how the continued illness of her old servant, Mrs. Grey, had still further complicated her misfortunes. Her only comfort through it all was contained in the letters which continued to arrive from Hugh. These had been posted at every port on his outward voyage, and the last contained a few words intimating that they were nearing the end of the voyage and that the letter would be posted on their arrival.

Then came an unaccountable silence. The usual weekly letter did not arrive. Another and another passed and still there was no letter. Disappointment grew to anxiety, and anxiety to absolute terror as to what could be the cause. Nothing but illness she was convinced would have prevented his writing, but even in that case, surely, she thought, some friend would have written for him. It really seemed as if there was to be no end to her troubles.

She had, of course, taken the earliest opportunity of finding the manuscript to which her father had referred. The extraordinary circumstance therein narrated—which has already been described in the prologue to this story—filled her with amazement. But that she had somewhere read of a similar circumstance in connection with another of our noble families she could hardly have deemed it credible, but there was the distinct affirmation of her own father and the attestation of his friend, so that there could be no doubt about it.

The sum accruing from the sale of the furniture she found, to her dismay, would hardly more than meet the debts her father had



incurred in the island. When everything was settled Vera had only sufficient to meet her bare expenses for a few weeks. She looked in vain for any occupation in Jersey. She felt that there was nothing for it but to return to town and seek for something as a means of support until she should at least hear from Hugh in answer to her letter about her father's death.

Her old servant had put by sufficient to live quietly upon in the island, so she was saved from any anxiety on her account. It was with a heavy heart that she bade her adieu. It seemed the breaking of the last link with the happy past, but it had to be done.

## CHAPTER XII.

GRACE CARLYON.

WHEN the heart is untroubled and summer sunshine floods the air, there are few things more pleasant than the start from Jersey by steamer for Southampton. The old tower of Elizabeth Castle stands squarely up flushed by the morning light. St. Aubyn nestles under its wood-crowned heights. Noirmount, as its name implies, sends its dark promontory far out to meet the southern wash of the waves, while the warm-tinted cliffs by Portelet give an intensity to the exquisite blue of the sea, which, as it rolls shoreward, seems to bring its colour and freshness from the very heart of the broad Atlantic. The

"Tender curving lines of creamy foam,"

which fringe the majestic cliffs by St. Brelade's and break upon the dark rocks of the Corbière give life and freshness to a scene upon which one gazes with loving lingering looks; for the heart must be cold indeed which has not stored up some pleasant memories of the little island or can leave it without regret.

But it is a different matter when the heart is bowed down with care; when the summer sunshine is past and the winter blasts hurl the dark rollers on the coast in masses that seem almost to tear the iron rocks from their foundations. It is difficult indeed to realise that it is the same world that we have watched in the summer sunshine. We seem to be translated to some planet of outer space; a sphere so far, that the sun himself is lost to view and the very elements seem whirling uncontrolled in a newly-born chaotic world.

Sad indeed were Vera's thoughts as the steamer left the harbour on the dark November morning when she bade adieu to her old home. A stiff gale was blowing from the south west, combing the sea into furrows and sending showers of spray all along the whole line of the deck. Most of the passengers sought refuge in the cabins even before the steamer had passed the Corbières, but Vera was a fairly good sailor, and, wrapped in her ulster, she had found refuge in one

of the covered seats on deck, and sat musing over the terrible changes the last few weeks had brought.

To add to her depression there had been no news of Hugh. She was quite at a loss to conceive the cause of his silence, and she was filled with gloomy forebodings. By this time he must almost have received the news of her great loss, and under the circumstances, she thought, he would surely have sent a telegram. It was useless to speculate, however. The future must be faced whatever it might bring, and she endeavoured to brace up her heart to face the worst.

She had just sufficient funds to keep her for a month or two, and she had arranged to return to her kind old landlady, Mrs. King, and to take some energetic steps to procure occupation. Mr. Colborne's offer had scarcely occupied her mind at all. The idea was repugnant to her in every way, and not the least of her objections was that Hugh would probably be strongly opposed to her accepting any offer of the kind.

As she mused, she became conscious of the fact that the storm seemed to be somewhat abating. The motion of the vessel was certainly easier, the decks were less sodden and slippery, and there were here and there breaks in the clouds overhead and fleeting patches of blue sky amid the scudding cloud-wrack. She rose and found they were getting under the lee of Guernsey, where the water was so much smoother that she was able to walk forward; for, in spite of her wraps, she felt chilly from her two hours' inaction. Suddenly her steps were arrested by the appearance of one of the lady passengers who was lying at full length on another of the sheltered seats covered by some oilskins which one of the crew had considerably brought for her. Her face was very beautiful in spite of its extreme pallor, and there was something in it which seemed, in an indefinite way, to be familiar to Vera, but the impression passed as soon as it was formed. Her eyes appeared to follow Vera as she passed along the deck, and there was a kind of appealing expression in them which caused Vera to turn and speak to her.

"Forgive me!" she said. "You seem very ill. Can I do anything for you?"

"You are very kind," the other replied. "I am not sea-sick; I do not suffer from that, but I am really very unwell."

There was something in the tone of the voice also which seemed familiar to Vera, but it was only a passing thought.

"Would you not be better in the cabin, then?" she answered. "Shall I help you to go below?"

"No, thanks, I could not stand the closeness of the cabin. I tried it for a short time. I am better here; but I should be so much obliged if you could get me something."

"Certainly—what would you like? Some tea or——"

"I think some warm wine and water would be best for me. I feel quite chilled; and I could eat a biscuit."

They were running into St. Peter's Port, and the preparations for breakfast were going on below. Vera sought the stewardess, who, in the smoother water, was somewhat relieved from her duties. The required refreshments were procured and administered to the invalid, who brightened up considerably.

"The fact is," she said, "I have not been at all well for some weeks past, and I have had a very tiring time in Jersey. I was up very late last night, and the early start and this wretched weather finished me. I scarcely touched anything before I left."

"Why not have some breakfast now?" suggested Vera.

"No, I could not take any now. I have no appetite. I daresay you are shocked at my taking stimulants at this hour. It is only lately I have taken them at all, but I had a great shock a few weeks ago."

"I hardly think stimulants a remedy for troubles," said Vera.

"No, I don't mean that. For goodness' sake don't think that I take them habitually; it is only now and then to steady the nerves. Mine is such a life of excitement."

Vera began to think her companion unusually communicative. She hardly knew what to make of her. In voice and manner she was a lady, and her face possessed unusual refinement and beauty, but there was a sort of freedom and *abandon* which puzzled her.

"In what way is your life one of such excitement?" she asked.

"Oh, I am an actress. I have been starring at St. Helier's. You must have seen my name on the walls pretty frequently during the last fortnight—Grace Carlyon."

Again the impression of familiarity—this time in connection with the name—passed through Vera's mind. But she had not heard it in Jersey; her thoughts had been too much occupied by her own affairs.

"Your name seems familiar to me," she said, "but I had not noticed it in Jersey. I have been much occupied during the last few weeks. Strangely enough your face seemed familiar, too, when I first saw you."

"And yours to me. How very curious. That was why I looked after you as you passed. Are you travelling alone?"

"Yes, quite alone."

"So am I. I am so glad you spoke to me. It was very kind of you. We shall be able to chat now all the way over. Are you going to London?"

"Yes."

"Then we can travel up together in the train. That is if you don't mind. It is so much nicer to have someone to talk to; it makes the time pass more quickly."

"I shall be very glad. I feel the better for our little chat, and I do believe it is going to be fine."

They were speeding out towards the Casquets now. The sky had

cleared—only some white clouds were hurrying across the deep blue overhead—while the waves, of a still deeper blue, were hurling their showers of white foam far up the dark grey rocks and deluging the lighthouse itself with clouds of spray. The fierce gusts of the morning had settled down into a hard breeze from the north-west, which, striking the steamer abaft the beam, sent her through the blue rollers with a heaving buoyancy, which, in sunny weather, is a delight to those who are entirely free from the troubles of *mal de mer*.

It is not good for man to be alone. It was astonishing how Vera had brightened up, even under the companionship of a comparative stranger, who was no doubt herself much enlivened by the meeting with Vera. The bright sunshine and the fresh breeze tended still further to raise their spirits, and even enabled them to laugh at some of the comic incidents which are of common occurrence on board a steamer in a rolling sea. The brighter weather had tempted one or two of the suffering passengers below to venture forth. Among them was an elderly gentleman, who cautiously raised his head above the companion to inspect the condition of things on deck. His face had just reached the level of the combings, when a sudden lurch of the vessel caused her to ship a sea. A film of green water flew straight across the deck, and catching the old gentleman fairly in the face, caused him to disappear down the companion like a Jack-in-a-box.

Both the girls burst into a laugh. The expression of the old gentleman's face under the deluge, and his sudden disappearance were irresistibly comic.

"And so you are really an actress," said Vera, when their laughter had subsided. "How very strange!"

She was thinking of Mr. Colborne's offer as she uttered the last words, and had not considered their effect on her companion.

"Why strange?" said the actress.

"Oh, I mean," said Vera, pausing a moment for an excuse, "that I have never met a real actress before."

"I hope you are not disenchanted."

"On the contrary: I think you very nice. It has done me a world of good to talk to you. But do tell me something about it. I have acted myself in a small way, you know, and I like it very much. What parts do you play?"

"Leading lady's parts—melodrama chiefly. Nelly Denver in 'The Silver King' is a favourite part of mine. I am very fond of Pauline in 'The Lady of Lyons' also. Have you seen 'The Lady of Lyons'?"

"Never."

"Well, they call it old-fashioned, but it always draws. Irving is very fond of it, and he must be a good judge."

"I should like to see it very much. I know some passages from it, and they strike me as very beautiful; but I have lived such a

retired life until quite recently that I have seen very little. Are you going to act in London now?"

"No; I shall be 'resting,' as we call it, until after Christmas, then I am engaged by Mr. Colborne for the provinces."

"Mr. Colborne!" exclaimed Vera in amazement.

"Yes. Why do you exclaim? Do you know him?"

"Yes. This is a most extraordinary coincidence. Mr. Colborne has offered me an engagement."

"Offered you one? Well, that is strange. How very odd that we should meet like this! But there, these coincidences are of such constant occurrence with me that I have ceased to wonder at them. Of course you have accepted?"

"Indeed, I have not! I have never been on the stage, and don't in the least know if I should like it!"

"Never been on the stage! Then why did he offer you an engagement?"

"Oh, he had seen me act in some amateur theatricals, and was pleased to say I had talent! It was only for small parts he wanted me."

"We must talk more about this," said Miss Carlyon. "I have taken quite a fancy to you. I should awfully like you to go out with us. Why do you refuse? Would not your friends like it?"

"I have no friends to object," said Vera, sadly. "I have only recently lost my father. He would not have liked it, I know. Perhaps that is one of my reasons."

She did not mention the other one—her dislike to being mixed up with Mr. Colborne.

"Then, I suppose, you are independent? Dear me, and all this time I don't even know your name, though I seem to know you quite well, and I am so very sorry for your trouble!"

"My name is Fane—Vera Fane."

"A splendid name for the stage. Couldn't be better. Oh, you must come! But *are* you independent? Forgive my asking, but I want you to come."

"Indeed, I am not independent! I am so poor that I must find some occupation."

"Poor and friendless! I am indeed sorry for you; but I am much the same. I have had to make my own way in life since I was quite a child. Oh, do come with us! I am sure we should get on so well together. I would take you under my wing; I would look after you like a mother."

"Why, you are not much older than I am!" said Vera, laughing.

"Indeed, I am! You look quite a child—a very pretty one too—while I am nearly twenty-eight."

"You don't look it, then."

"Well, I suppose we actresses have a knack of making ourselves look young; but, heaven knows, I have had enough to try me! I

wonder sometimes that I am alive. I will tell you my story one day—that is, if you come with us—but don't let us get on sad subjects now. See, the clouds are all gone, and there is actually that old gentleman on deck at last. Well, there is some brightness in life after all."

The weather had still further moderated. They were able to take a turn up and down the deck, and by-and-by they had lunch together and then another turn on deck.

Miss Carlyon returned to the subject of the engagement again and again, but Vera would make no promise. Of course she could not reveal her chief reasons, and her companion was lost in wonderment.

"Why, dear me," she said, "here are women going through all sorts of struggles to make their way in the world, and you refuse an offer like this! It is literally flying in the face of Providence!"

"I hope it will not prove so. I have very strong reasons for refusing, which I cannot well explain; but I will think it over."

"And you will let me know? Well, I must give you my address, and I must have yours; but I hope, in any case, that we may see each other sometimes. Remember you may be a long time before you get a chance like this again. I believe Mr. Colborne will make an excellent manager, and he has secured a strong company. Then his connection is something to be considered; he knows everybody."

By this time they were nearing the Needles, which lay on the horizon bathed in the soft orange tint of the evening sky, and contrasting so beautifully with the dark rolling spaces of sea which lay between; and by-and-by, as the darkness came down, they entered the quiet reaches of Southampton Water and saw the lights of the distant town flashing like gold in the gathering gloom and sending long shafts of fire down into the rippling waters beneath.

But those who go down to the sea in ships must prepare for sudden surprises. The afternoon, which had passed so peacefully, was destined to end in a catastrophe as appalling as was sudden.

The steamer was gliding past Netley Hospital and fast approaching a number of vessels of all sizes, which were lying at anchor in the roads. Another huge steamer, a leviathan of the deep outward bound, was approaching them rapidly on the starboard bow.

The wind, which had fallen light, had drawn in to the northward; and between the two steamers, probably beating in to her anchorage, was a cutter yacht of about fifty tons. Her course would take her right under the bows of the outward-bound steamer. To avoid this she was brought head to wind, and then lay away on the other tack apparently unconscious of the Jersey boat, which was close upon her. Whether the noise of the outward-bound had prevented her steersman hearing the other boat, or whether the close-hauled mainsail hid it from view as she laid over to the breeze, was not apparent; but the imminence of the danger at once struck the captain of the Jersey boat. He shouted in stentorian tones from his place on the bridge:



"Luff up, luff up, or we shall be into you!"

"All right," came the answer. "We shall clear you."

But the steerman had not calculated on one thing. The tide was coming down like a sluice, at the same moment the wind failed, and the next, the yacht was close under the steamer's bows.

The captain almost shrieked his orders.

"Stop her! Hard astern! Ah, too late!"

There was a crash, a rending of cordage, and the next moment the yacht was a shapeless mass under the stem of the steamer, which seemed to cut right into her.

A wild cry went up from the yacht's crew as she went under, and the next moment, in the dim light, some of them were seen struggling in the water. In an instant life-buoys were thrown over, and in an incredibly short time, a boat was lowered and rapidly approached the struggling men. Two of them had managed to seize life-buoys, but others had gone under in the commotion caused by the steamer's paddles as she rapidly backed. Then the paddles came to a stop and the boat remained on the look-out for any others who might rise, but none appeared. The yacht had sunk, but the water was shallow, and her crosstrees and topmast were above water, with the topsail torn from its seizings, drifting out on the tide. Another boat had been lowered and was rowed about for a considerable interval, while the two rescued men were brought on board. With a few turns of the paddles the steamer was kept in as nearly as possible the same position, until the captain felt that he could do no more, and reluctantly gave the order to go ahead.

With an indescribable sickening of heart, Vera and her companion had watched the catastrophe from the deck. No one, of course, knew the extent of the disaster, as the rescued men were too enfeebled by the shock and by their immersion to be questioned. When all hope of rescuing any more was over, they retired to the saloon, where most of the lady-passengers, horrified and bewildered by the awful occurrence, had assembled. As they were seated together, with their arms round each other, a gentleman entered the saloon, and went up to a lady who sat near them.

"They have discovered whose yacht it is from the men who were picked up," he said. "It belonged to a Colonel Waring, who was returning from the Mediterranean. The dreadful part of the business is, that the owner and a friend were at dinner in the cabin when the catastrophe occurred. They must have been drowned by the first rush of water. It is a horrible business."

Vera's heart sickened at this dreadful announcement, but she was aroused by a low moan at her side. She turned to see her companion sinking back among the cushions.

The next moment Miss Carlyon had fainted dead away.

*(To be continued.)*



## BOOKSELLERS AND LITERATURE.

BY G. STANLEY ELLIS.

DOWN Booksellers' Row there runs a tale that the owner of a well-known wineshop in the Strand went one day to a second-hand bookshop in the Row and said :

"Oh, my wife and son want some books by some man or other. I don't know whether you've ever heard of him ; I never had before they spoke of him. Let's see, what's his name ? I forget. What is it, now ? Oh, I know—Dickens—Charles Dickens. Ever heard of him ?"

But while such a want of knowledge may be allowable to the wineshop owner, it is a different thing with a bookseller. Now most second-hand booksellers know something of the insides of books, and some of them know everything, although the business success of a bookseller is generally in inverse ratio to his knowledge.

But it is the discount bookseller who knows nothing. One of these was lately asked :

"Have you got a copy of 'Coke upon Lyttleton' ?" and said :

"We haven't got it in stock at present. We can get it for you ; and we have 'Lyttleton on Cricket.'"

And another :

"Have you got Lang's book on Burns ?"

"No ; but we keep the 'Family Doctor,' and I think that will contain all you want."

The old-fashioned apprenticeship seems to be dying out among booksellers, and the result is a race of shopmen who sell so many pounds or yards of book with as much intelligence and interest as they would show in selling the same weight of tintacks, and with far less than in selling the same length of silk.

The old second-hand bookseller loved his books so much that, if he got a rare copy, he would often refuse to sell it, or would put a prohibitive price on it to prevent a customer from buying it. He often became a citizen of literary or journalistic Bohemia, with the reckless points tempered by the tradesmanlike instinct.

But now he complains that the Jews are cutting up his trade. As readers of Thackeray's 'Codlingsby' will remember, Booksellers' Row was once a Ghetto consecrated to the trade in old clothes, oranges, and cedarwood pencils. Then the second-hand book-trade invaded and captured it. Now the Jews are returning, and are recapturing not only the street, but the old bookselling trade. Once more the almond-eyed damsels, the matrons built on a generous scale, may be

seen at the doors, though the fact that the Jews are in the business tends to knock the bottom out of the old booksellers' contention that there is no money in the trade; for where no money is to be made there are no Jews.

A well-known second-hand bookseller in the Row, the late Mr. Hindley, produced several antiquarian books which had a high reputation, though, owing to the limited circle to which they appealed, not a very large sale. They were on the old cries of London, the Kit-Cat Club, and similar subjects.

Of course the most unliterary of booksellers are the discount booksellers, for whose very existence Mr. Gladstone is to be praised—or blamed—for it was his bill which abolished the former net price monopoly. Though, if the public thinks it gets sixpennyworth of literature for fourpence halfpenny, it greatly flatters itself. But then it generally does do so. "Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat," and the bookseller ought to take some literature "in at the pores." That he does not always do so is shown by orders given by the retail trade to Messrs. Simpkin Marshall, Messrs. Hamilton, Messrs. Kent and Company, during the year 1896. There may have been some sarcastic intention in asking for the 'Republic of Plato' as the 'Republic of Flats'; but why did 'Bog Myrtle and Peat' and 'The Worcester Diocesan Calendar' become 'Boy, Muscle and the Peas' and 'Worcester's Diseases of the Callender,' and why did 'In the Track of the Storm' become 'The Treacle of Storm'? 'Photograms, 1895' may easily have become 'Photo Frames, 1895,' and 'Nobly Born' may have become 'Nobody Born' through an intensely literary handwriting. Would Dr. Conan Doyle have recognised 'Stories from the Diary of a Doctor' as 'Stories from a Diary Adopted'? We all know that University men have a language of their own, and that may be why 'Acts of the Apostles, Cambridge Bible' became 'Aces and the Aposites of Cambridge.' An evident friend of and sympathiser with the agricultural interest turned 'Gaudeamus. By Farmer' into 'God Aim us by a Farmer.' 'Duologues. By Simpson' appreciated to 'Jewel Logs by Simpsons.' 'Thoughts for Working Days' were the no less suggestive 'Thoughts for Washing Days.' 'Caudle's Curtain Lectures' were with great difficulty recognised in 'Gourdals Cart in Lecture.' Similarity in sound made 'Nansen's Voyage to Greenland' into 'Nancy's Voyage to Greenland.' The titular length of 'The Reverend Frazer's Silent Gods and Sunsteeped Lands' may have led to its recognition in 'River Frozen, Silent Gold and Unsteeped Lands.' Some one, perhaps of chemical tastes, asked for the 'Carbuncle Clue' under the name of 'Carbonical Club.'

How did Mr. Crockett like to hear 'Play Actress, by Crockett, Pseudonym Library,' described as 'Play Actress and Cricket in the Pandemonium Library'? Charlotte might have been pleased to find that 'Charlotte's Inheritance' turned up as 'Charlotte in Loveliness.' Some embryo engineer wanted 'How to make a Hand Camera'

under the name of 'How to make a Hand Camel.' Lord Lytton must be losing ground; for 'Alice, or the Mysteries' became 'Alice and her Mistress': though his lordship is only in the same boat with living authors, for 'Farrar's Life of Christ' became, heedless of chronology, 'Pharaoh's Life of Christ.' A coming Darwin, instead of 'Birth and Growth of Worlds,' asked for 'Birth and Growth of Worms.' One, ignorant of Latin, wanting 'Frondes Agrestes,' requested 'Founders and Heretics'; and 'Key to Parsing and Analysis' became 'Key to Carving and Analysis.' This seems, by implication, to combat the theory that learning grammar has no effect on the literary taste; for it is evident that the unliterary bookseller knew no grammar, or he would have known that analysis is not a carving away of what is useful, but a piling up of what is superfluous. Internal evidence shows that a suburban or provincial mind asked for the 'Brown Ambassador' as 'Brown Antimacassar.' Most likely slipshod pronunciation on the part of a customer was the cause of 'French Heroines' appearing as 'Frenchie Owen'; and the same may be said of 'Across Russian Snows' and 'Across the Russian's Nose.' 'Morgan's St. Paul in Britain' became 'Morgan's St. Paul in Brighton,' a place wherein St. Paul might find himself more at sea than he did elsewhere on a certain notable occasion. Biblical books received very bad treatment, for 'Cambridge Bible, Timothy and Titus,' was 'Can Bridge of The Timothy and the Titus'; 'Cambridge Bible, Genesis,' 'C. B. Genius, or Generous, or some such thing'; while, probably about Boatrace Day and the inter-varsity sports, 'Oxford and Cambridge Galatians' was 'Oxford and Cambridge Gladiators'; and 'Swete's Story of the Septuagint' was 'Sweet Story of the Piptuagint,' the last word very likely arising from some one writing with a curly capital "S" and not looping his small "e." 'Miracles of Modern Spiritualism' became 'Marbles of Modern Speculation,' and—oh! Mr. Parker, what did they do?—'Seats of the Mighty' was transformed into 'Think of the Mighty,' or 'Sinks of the Mighty.' 'Boy Hero. By Walsham How' was, not unnaturally, 'Boy Hero of Walthamstow.' A bookseller, evidently ignorant of Italian, and writing of something which he did know, turned 'Improvisatore' into 'Improver's Story.' 'Handbook to Orkneys and Shetland' became 'Handbook to Orkney's Shorthand.' The spread of science explains why 'Tryphena in Love' blossomed into 'Telephona in Love.'

The last example shall come from him whose words we are all supposed to know, and which we don't. 'Shakespeare's Othello' was turned into 'Shakespeare's The Felon.'

## THROUGH NIGHT TO LIGHT.

### I.

"WE COME FROM GOD, WHO IS OUR HOME."

A FOOLISH thing the nurses say—that when  
The babe smiles in his sleep 'tis that in dreams  
He sees again the angels by the streams  
Of late-left Paradise; and hears again  
The talk they hold of things beyond our ken,  
Whose hearts are full of only worldly schemes—  
Though once we too heard those angelic themes  
Before we knew the change called birth by men.  
And is it after all a foolish thought?  
Ah, looking on the sweet, mysterious smile  
Upon the little face, that yet knows nought  
Of human mirth, of human grief or guile—  
Do not the tears upspring into our eyes,  
Who cannot hear the talk in Paradise?

### II.

"LITTLE CHILDREN."

"Of such God's kingdom is," He said who took  
The children in His arms, and would not let  
Them go unblessed away. And once He set  
A child 'midst those proud hearts who could not brook  
The second place. The Master bade them look  
Upon the little child, that wist not yet  
Of first or second, and their strife forget.  
The lowliest heart's writ highest in God's book.  
Oh, little hands and trustful, guileless eyes!  
Oh, faltering lips, so ignorant and wise!  
Oh, sacred childhood! When we think how soon  
The world will jar the music out of tune,  
Pitying we end who reverently began,  
Because the child must grow into a man.

### III.

"STRIFE COMES WITH MANHOOD, AND WAKING WITH DAY."

Doth only pity move us that the child,  
Grown to a man, shall man's sad wisdom learn—  
Shall know defeat and loss, and, though he yearn  
For what is best, shall be by worst beguiled;  
Shall taste of wild despair, of hope more wild;  
Shall eager for the front of battle burn,  
Yet fall before the foe he most did spurn,  
His gilded harness broken and defiled?  
Fair flaunts the flag that battle never knew,  
But all eyes turn from banners fresh and brave  
To colours stained and torn, shot through and through,  
Because round them the changing battle drave.  
And he that never desperate stood at bay  
Knows not the victor's joy at close of day!

M. A. M. MARKS.

## TITIAN VERCELLI.

FROM THE GERMAN OF ELISE POLKO.

## I.

IN the year 1556, the great master, Titian Vercelli, had already attained his sixtieth year.

No one would have imagined it though, however closely he may have scrutinised the painter's face or his form, for Titian Vercelli was of as lofty a carriage as one newly entered upon life, and in the grace and vivacity of his movements he compared favourably with the youngest. The handsomest men of the day sank into insignificance in his presence, like the field flower in the presence of the Marvel of Peru: it was as though the gods had invested this already richly endowed mortal with the attribute of eternal youth. When he walked through the market-place or slowly paced the Piazzetto in earnest conversation with his pupils, he looked like a king in both carriage and mien.

His dress was always of the richest dark velvet, with satin puffing and the heaviest gold embroidery, and the manner in which he wore his cloak was deemed worthy of imitation by young and old. The clasp of his cap glittered with precious stones, and the white ostrich plume hung far down on his shoulder. In his long chestnut beard, and in his thick, closely-shorn hair, were to be found as yet no traces of silver; on the magnificent brow were to be seen only those lines usually graven upon the face by deep thought, not the furrows of age and care. The eyes also, those fiery stars, told to all who could interpret their language what a mighty-winged artist's soul had taken its earthly habitation in this noble form.

The great painter lived, too, like a youth of twenty; all Venice knew that. His elegant Palazzo stood open after the hours of work to all his friends, of whom he numbered not a few. He especially loved to refresh himself after his arduous labours by a light discourse with a chosen number.

The merriest of his "Bacchanale," however, took place in his beautiful "Giardino," where one could enjoy the most exquisite view of the wide sea, and of the island Murano. It was here that the wily Pietro Aretino, the gay Francesco Priscianese, the witty Sansovino, and the renowned historian, Jacob Naldi, assembled to feast, to carouse, and to rejoice over their very existence.

A detailed account of this "Bacchanale," which was celebrated throughout Venice, may be read in a letter written by the above-mentioned Francesco Priscianese, printed about the year 1553. In the same writing mention is made of the music, both instrumental and vocal, of the beautiful ladies who glorified the fêtes with their presence.

Whilst the charming daughter of the master tarried at home, it was she who with bewitching grace waited upon her father's guests, and enraptured all with her sweet voice and admirable lute playing.

Titian himself was one evening so much affected by the appearance of his darling the blue-eyed Lavinia, as she approached the table, bearing in her hands a costly dish laden with fruit, that the next morning he painted the scene. This picture is a fine specimen of all the excellences of the Titian style in their most exalted forms, the magic splendour of the colouring, the surpassing truth to life, the tenderest shading of the flesh tints, the most perfect moulding of the form. This luxuriant girlish form, clad in a sumptuous green robe; this laughing, Hebe-like countenance; this brow, encompassed by its rich golden hair; these lips, these perfect hands and arms, the whole glittering with the Titian light, in the Titian glow, became an object of universal wonderment. This painted Titian's daughter found as many adorers as the living one, and more too, for who is not transported with this master-work, even unto the present day, when the sweet form it represents has long since fallen to dust and ashes?

When Lavinia was led from her father's house by a beloved husband, a sculptor of Bologna, lovely daughters of Venice took her place, and wearied themselves to recall the departed magic of the far-renowned "*Bacchanale*."

And they succeeded in the highest degree; the circle continually increased; the splendour of the vessels, the abundance of the flowers, the selection of food, and the costliness of the wines, would have done honour to the table of a prince; yet, strange as it may seem, the two sons of the master seldom or never appeared at these feasts.

Pomponio, the eldest, was, although he wore the priestly garb, one of the greatest roués in the city of isles, and by his dissolute life caused his father the bitterest sorrow, especially because of the sanctimonious air he wore as a covering. From his earliest childhood, Pomponio had evinced the lowest tastes; no single trait of his character reminded one of his noble, high-minded father. In the presence of this son, Titian experienced a singular timidity and reserve, a sort of aversion, which, however, he carefully sought to conquer, and only heaped the unworthy recipient with so much the greater favours. But his inexhaustible kindness only seemed to embitter this dull soul, and upon every opportunity Pomponio betrayed a truly alarming hatred towards his benefactor. At last father and son mutually avoided one another, and scarcely met three times in the course of the year.

Orazio, the second son, had inherited the beauty of his early lost mother, and was, with his dark eyes and hair, his delicate, almost feminine features, and his graceful form, the darling of the ladies of the city. He was of a cheerful, enthusiastic disposition, led a careless life, but was a most excellent portrait painter, whose works gave satisfaction even to his father.



The brothers kept up separate establishments ; they mutually hated one another, scarcely even speaking when they met in the street. Did one chance to appear at his father's table, there was an end at once to all harmless merriment and innocent jest. Before Pomponio's coarse gaze, the graces, the pure-minded ladies, fled abashed, and the wine-cup lost its relish. Was it Orazio who came amongst them, he was sure to go off into such a strain of sentimental nonsense or empty boastings, that the men lost all patience.

The master was, therefore, in the habit, as tradition tells, of anxiously scanning the assembled guests upon entering the banquetting hall, and when his gaze was neither met by Pomponio's licentious eye, nor Orazio's vain, empty smile, he would draw a long breath, and exclaim : "Aha, my friends, we shall be right merry to-day, for neither of my sons is here, I see." Thus it is, every one has his cross to bear, of which no power can relieve him but the hand of death, and even heaven's most favoured sons are not exempt. Few, however, in Venice, had the least idea how heavy the burden was which the celebrated Titian Vercelli bore ; his trusty servant alone, who often heard him heavily pacing his chamber in the still hours of the night, and knew what heart-rending sighs escaped his breast, had a suspicion of it. Yet the people said in the city, many perhaps at the very same hour, "Ah, who is there in the world who can sleep so sweetly and dream so pleasantly as Titian, for he has all that heart can desire !"

Alas, the true joys of life, the real sunshine of our existence, proceed from the heart alone ; if the heart is at ease, then is life bright and clear ; if it is oppressed and bleeding we feel as though we stood in a shadow, however brilliant our career may otherwise be. It is the same as the scenery at the theatre ; no one but the machinist is supposed to know that all the rosy light, the bright green, the deep sky blue that captivates the fancy of the multitude, is a coarse, rough painting, and that the sun does not really shine.

There was a time, however, when Titian's heart was not torn by his sorrow, and that was when he stood before his easel ; then, and then only, none of earth's sorrows could affect him. The magic world of colours took him captive, surrounded him with light, dazzled him, bore him where no shadow could reach him, and in this realm of wonders he swayed a mighty sceptre, and was absolute king and ruler. What a glorious consciousness.

One morning, at a very unusual hour, Orazio entered his father's studio in a state of the wildest excitement. Titian looked up amazed, and the students who were working in the cool broad hall eagerly turned their heads after the young man, alive with curiosity. He strode rapidly through their midst with a hasty greeting right up to his father, and said, very humbly, in a pleading manner :

"Can you spare me a few moments ? I will not take up much of your precious time ; but I pray you will not deny my request."



The master laid down his pallet and stick, turned a little aside, and raised a heavy curtain which had concealed from view a small, richly-furnished room, containing two chairs; a place where Titian often retired to rest or to hold a private interview with a friend. "Walk in," he said, to his son, then he dropped the curtain—the heavy folds closed, and the two were alone.

"So far in my life I have been a source of much sorrow to you and but little joy," Orazio began, after a moment's pause, half proudly, half confusedly, whilst a flush overspread his cheeks, and his eyes fell beneath his father's searching gaze. "You will, therefore, perhaps scarcely believe me when I tell you that henceforth it shall be otherwise. It is my solemn resolution to do credit to your name. Will you assist me in attaining such a goal?"

"Sit down, my son, and tell me what I can do for you."

"Oh, fear nothing! I have not come as I so often have done, to ask for money, but to beg of you to take a lady, whose name I will tell you, for your pupil."

"A lady? Have you forgotten, boy, that for six years I have refused to take any lady pupils?"

"No, I have not forgotten that, nor that it is your wont steadfastly to refuse the petitions of the fair sex, and yet I dare make this request. Should you ask me from whence I have obtained so much courage, I would reply that the salvation or the destruction of my future life depends upon the 'yes' or the 'no' which may fall from your lips."

"Ah, I see this concerns a new intrigue! Away with your frivolous wishes; for I will not move a finger to assist you in the accomplishment of your desires!"

"No, my father; as I hope one day to join the company of the blest, it is no intrigue for which I invoke your aid. A sacred love has entered my heart, my past life lies before me like a crushed serpent; listen to my confession. It was last Sunday morning, when leaning against a pillar in the vicinity of the font in San Marco, I watched the ladies as they left the church. I must confess that I had not gone in to pray, but only to contemplate. As, however, there was nothing particularly deserving of contemplation, I found time enough to say a devout pater-noster like a good Christian. When the mass was over, and the ladies, old and young, dipped the ends of their fingers into the holy water, I looked idly on, for there was not one sufficiently attractive to induce me to dip my fingers in for her sake. At last, just as I was about to leave, two female figures clothed in black approached from a side aisle. The first was tall and slender, and closely veiled. The second was small and dainty, and let her mantle fall back, displaying a beautiful brunette neck. 'It is he—there is no doubt about it!' she whispered to her companion. Upon this they both stood still, and seemed to examine me from head to foot. I could not distinguish their features, for

they wore satin masks with a heavy lace edging. At last the little one, at a sign from the other, approached me with the question, 'Are not you Orazio, the portrait painter, the son of Titian Vercelli?'

"Yes, beauteous Signora," I replied.

"Will you undertake to paint the portrait of a Gentil-donna to be sent to Ferrara without delay?"

"I will use every endeavour to do so, and the more beautiful she is the finer painting I can make."

"The preference has been given you because there are such excellent testimonials of your skill, and I assure you a successful portrait of the Signora of whom I speak would be your fortune at the Court of Ferrara."

"I shall consider it sufficient good fortune to paint the noble lady who has done me the honour to select me to paint her."

"You were expected to be grateful for the preference which has been shown you, and will soon have an opportunity of giving proof of your gratitude. Not another word now. Spare all the fine things you have to say until you see the Signora for yourself. To-morrow morning, after second mass, report yourself at the Palazzo Spilemberga."

"Then, gracefully bowing her little head, she approached the font. The other one gave me a slight queenly greeting, dipped into the holy water the most beautiful fingers my eyes have ever beheld, and then they both vanished."

"Why I had not the courage to follow them I cannot tell. Your formerly so bold son now stole shyly and thoughtfully back to his dwelling. Yesterday, at the appointed time, my gondola bore me to the steps of the Palazzo. You probably remember that it is situated at the end of the canal, and its appearance of gloomy splendour readily distinguishes it from the other Palazzos around. Until now the miserly old Ursula di Spilemberga resided there alone, and people say that, in spite of her fifty years, she is ever on the look-out for a husband. A few days ago the true heiress of the Spilemberga estate, young Irene, returned home from Ferrara, where she had been educated. All this I learned on my way to the Palazzo from the gondolier. When I arrived at my destination, a solemn-looking, grey-headed servant led the way to the ladies' sitting-room. 'Are you taking me to Signora Ursula?' I asked."

"No, Signor. This is the hour which Signora Ursula daily devotes to prayer, attended by her confessor."

"We passed through many rooms, doors opened and closed after us, till finally a joyous, ringing laugh struck my ear. The old attendant raised a curtain, and the two young girls I had met in the church eagerly turned their heads towards me. One of them was dressed in a crimson satin robe embroidered with gold, with a spangled net over her jet black hair. She had the most luxuriant neck and charming arms imaginable, and it was she who had laughed so merrily, for the smile still trembled upon her rosy lips. The other

one wore a black velvet robe, and is the most perfect type of woman I have ever seen, and your son Orazio numbers among his acquaintances the most beautiful women of Venice. She is so perfect that she would even satisfy your artist's eye, and has so pure, earnest, and good a countenance that I even think one look at her would convert a Pomponio upon the spot. She greeted me calmly and proudly, whilst the little one eyed me roguishly, and said, 'You have been bidden to wait upon the mistress of this house; now show us if you have penetration enough to discover which is she.'

"I replied quietly, 'So far as is known to me, Signora Ursula di Spilemberga has hitherto ruled in this Palazzo.'

"'Not now—not now! A young mistress has now made her appearance. If you can guess which of us two is Irene di Spilemberga, the honour of doing what we mentioned to you in San Marco shall be awarded you.'

"'Is the Gentil-donna who bears the gracious name of Irene a native of Venice?'

"'She is.'

"Then I turned and bowed low before the wondrously beautiful lady in black velvet.

"The little one sprang up, pouting. 'How did you know that?' she cried, with the prettiest little frown.

"'Because I know that you are no daughter of Venice; your eyes and the shape of your face tell me that.'

"'You must keep your word, then, Ritta,' said the blonde in black velvet, smiling.

"'Well, then, Orazio Vercelli, it is I you are to paint. You can begin to-day; there is an easel, canvas, and paints in the next room all ready. Afterwards you can paint my noble friend, but only upon one condition. You must persuade your renowned father to take her as a pupil for the space of four months. If you succeed in that and in my portrait, Irene di Spilemberga shall surely sit to you.'

"And now, my father, you know all. The most perfect creature in the world, the most glorious form, will permit me to paint her if you will have it so. My artist's soul leaps within me at the thought of it, and my heart trembles with joy at the very idea. The condition is an odd one, I admit, but is not a woman's head the repository for all kinds of strange things? Father, I feel that her image will inspire me to a work worthy of your name. Do not destroy this hope, this enthusiasm within me. Make me happy, make me honoured."

Titian was silent for a long while, then he raised his eyes to his son, and said:

"But why did not Irene di Spilemberga speak with me herself—why this round-about way? I never was a man from whom the ladies fled affrighted. Have I grown so old and crabbed that they are beginning to shun me now?"

"The Gentil-donna had learned from the teacher who instructed

her in painting in Ferrara—a pupil of Verracchio—that for a long time past you had refused to take any lady scholars. I imagine, too, from something that Ritta said, that she did see you once, but did not find courage enough to address you.”

The master listened thoughtfully, and, quick as lightning, a half-vanished memory flashed across his brain, and from moment to moment grew in distinctness. “Yes, that was she!”

It happened a few weeks since that one beautiful evening Titian and Paolo Veronese promenaded the Piazzetta in earnest conversation upon the Divine Art. The moon shone down from the dark blue sky, and scarce a breath of air stirred from the sea. On the Piazzetta there moved hither and thither a motley throng of men and women. The Palazzo of the Doges was brilliantly illuminated, and the light streamed majestically out through the crimson curtains. A snake-tamer had spread his table near one of the pillars of the winged lion, and displayed the mysteries of his art to a gaping multitude. Flower-girls offered their charming wares for sale, children ran about with fruit. Jest and merriment were upon every lip, and the lively song of the gondolier floated across the water.

The two masters finally stood still near the arcades, and watched the gambols of some children who had encamped upon the stone pavement near. Suddenly two closely-veiled females emerged from the obscurity of the arch, and Titian’s ear detected the following words—

“Let me alone, Ritta! This and no other is Titian Vercelli; it is just as I have pictured him to myself—exactly. Trust me—it must be he.”

And immediately the smaller of the two approached him and murmured:

“Titian Vercelli, a noble lady wishes to speak with you a moment—over there in the twelfth arch of the arcade.”

And with this she glided away.

The master hastily parted from Paolo Veronese, who gave him his hand with a sly smile, and obeyed the mysterious summons.

When he reached the place pointed out to him, he found a dignified female form leaning against a pillar. He approached respectfully; the unknown fair one trembled visibly, and made several attempts to speak, but in vain. Finally she shook her head, and made a movement as though it were reluctantly, for him to depart.

He bowed proudly, and turned to obey her, but he had not gone far when a soft garment had fluttered against his arm, and the stranger stood beside him once more. With the impetuosity of a child, and the impassioned warmth of a woman, she drew a splendid bouquet from her bosom and pressed it into the hands of the astonished man.

Then her companion suddenly appeared, and the two had vanished before the master had time to recover from his surprise. Only the

fragrant flowers in his hand proved to him that he had not been dreaming.

For a whole week this mysterious adventure had occupied Titian's heart, and at the same hour he might daily be seen watching upon the Piazzetta, but he found no traces of the beautiful stranger. By the second week, however, the master thought but seldom of the occurrence, and now he had nearly forgotten it, when Orazio's story unexpectedly recalled that evening to his mind.

At last the voice of Orazio recalled the master from the dream-world into which he had wandered.

"Of what are you thinking all this time?" inquired the young man, impatiently. "Is it too hard a task for you to do something for the love of your son?"

"I have indeed done many things for my son, which have fallen heavily upon me!" replied Titian, gravely. "Make yourself easy though: I am not disposed to stand in the way of your happiness this time. I will instruct Irene di Spilemberga. You may carry her my decision at once. Tell her I will be with her to-morrow."

\* \* \* \* \*

When the master appeared at the Palazzo of the Spilemberga family, he was conducted into a magnificently furnished apartment, where stood prepared a neat little easel. A green silk curtain, which could be lowered or raised at pleasure, hung before the window. And now from a side door his future pupil advanced to meet him. This time she wore a white satin dress, with an upper skirt of violet velvet, looped up on the left side by the heavy gold cord of a little velvet bag which hung there. The rich blonde hair was arranged in Grecian coils, with a string of pearls wreathed about it. The young girl looked very pale as she greeted the great master, but her bearing was proud and her sweet voice firm. When Titian, whilst conversing with her, attentively watched her, he could well understand how such beauty could transform even a more thoughtless fellow than Orazio. This was a true daughter of Venice—the face oval, the sunny hair entwined with pearls, the lips deep vermilion, the mouth of the most exquisite shape, the nose small and delicate, the figure tall and slender, the whole bearing an appearance more lovely and charming than magnificent, and the movements of the most perfect gracefulness, the little hands and feet no larger than those of a child twelve years old. Involuntarily a sigh escaped the master.

"Oh, happy Orazio! Oh, blessed youth!"

Titian learned, in conversation with the Signora, that she was no beginner who laid claim to his precious time. Irene had passed through a severe course of studies with her teacher in Ferrara, far more so than could be expected of so young a creature, and the copies which she now blushing showed the celebrated master excited Titian's liveliest attention. His keen artist's eye discovered in these sketches the traces of a mighty talent, a gift almost too great and

significant for the hand of a delicate woman. He was by no means sparing in his praises, and Irene's sparkling eyes and blissful smile showed how deep was the joy of her heart at the expressions of satisfaction. They conversed for a little while longer, settled the hour for the lessons, and then parted with the significant words: "*A rivederci!*"

\* \* \* \* \*

The following day, Irene di Spilemberga was duly installed as pupil of the great Titian. The master only came three times in the week; but then he did not give only the hour engaged, but often lingered two hours, and sometimes longer, in the Palazzo; and when in his gondola, homeward-bound, he wondered over the singularly rapid flight of time. How could it have been otherwise than rapid, when before the easel stood one of the most glorious beauties of Venice? What lights and shadows played upon the slightest movement over this golden hair, and trembled over this perfect neck! How artistically the folds of the white satin robe hung, and the exquisite skin on the hands and arm was enough to drive to distraction even one who was master in flesh colours.

At first Titian took great pains to watch the brush of his pupil rather than the hand that guided it; but he would have been no master of colours and shades whose painter's eye would not finally have been attracted and ravished by the ever-varying lights and shadows of the living form so close beside him. Let him play the schoolmaster ever so strictly at times, he would, perchance, the very next moment leave unnoticed the most striking fault, because he was lost in wonder at the purity of his pupil's profile, or else was pondering over the superb flesh-tints of her arms.

Irene herself spoke but little, and was, to all appearance, only the attentive, eager student; and yet at times she would heave a sigh as though oppressed by a sorrow to which she could give no words; and ever and anon a hasty blush would overspread her face as she would lay aside her brush as though exhausted, then take it up again and go to work with renewed energy. When the master spoke to her, she would start as though from deep dreams, and grow confused in her replies; and Titian, who watched her so closely, would think, "The prattling and merry laughter of her friend and the boy disturbs her, annoys her, perhaps;" and again his heart would murmur—"Oh, youth! Oh, happy Orazio!"

For in the adjoining apartment might be seen, through the half-drawn curtain, another scarcely less attractive picture. There sat at the same time Orazio the young painter and the bewitching Ritta. The work did not progress as rapidly as it might, it is true, but there was so much the more time for talking and joking, and for the free play of the most ardent glances, for the fickle heart of Titian's son lay, from the very first sitting, at the feet of the little Ritta. Irene di Spilemberga was yet to him a saint whom he adored; Ritta, however,



a beautiful woman whom, with all his heart and soul, he longed to call his own.

Titian perceived this inconstancy of Orazio almost with indignation. However bewitching the little Ritta might look in her pale crimson garment, with fresh flowers in her hair, her lute on her arm, and with her charming smile, she found no favour in the master's sight.

"The boy must be distraught if he prefer the maid of honour to the queen!" he would murmur, when a merry laugh or the sound of the lute smote his ear as Signora Ritta sang in a low voice some bantering song.

There were times, though, when a cloud would pass over the bright horizon. Ursula di Spilemberga, Irene's aunt, in a rustling brocade silk, would enter the room and stride majestically from easel to easel without speaking a word. A deep paleness would overspread Irene's cheeks at such times, and she would draw a long breath when the apparition had vanished.

"She has never loved me," Irene said once, when, after the frigid form had departed, she met Titian's questioning gaze; "but since the new confessor spends so much time with her, I have every reason to believe that she hates me. I have tried to please her too, but this man seems to be her evil genius."

"Have you done anything to gain the displeasure of this reverend gentleman?"

"Yes, I have refused to confess to him. I prefer confessing to my mother's confessor, the Padre Andreo."

"How I envy the excellent Padre the confessions of such an innocent maiden's heart," said Titian, sportively. "I suppose you are very careful about telling him of every scolding you get from me for making a false movement with your brush or putting on too much colour; for what else have you to confess?"

She turned towards him, and said softly and expressively, "Yes, I have mentioned your name in my confessions!"

"Then mention it once in your prayers too—just once—I entreat you!" he replied just as softly, and gazing passionately into her eyes.

"And what if I have already done so?" she breathed, with downcast eyes.

Just then Ritta called out her friend's name with her fresh young voice, and begged her to come in and give her opinion about an expression Orazio was giving to her portrait by a certain line he was drawing between the eyebrows.

"He makes me look as though I were twenty years old instead of seventeen," she cried, pettishly.

They talked and laughed a few moments about the charming bewitching little frown, and when Irene returned to her easel she found that Titian Vercelli had quitted the apartment.

Titian now often saw his son Orazio. To the father's heartfelt delight, he now carefully shunned the carousals of his former



companions, passed indifferently by the most attractively beautiful faces, and often sat for hours at a time in his father's studio.

He could not be accused of working too hard, it is true, because he sat dreaming for the most part of the time; but with so happy a countenance and such beaming eyes, that no one could blame him for it, least of all his own father. There was no confidential intercourse between these two; they both seemed studiously to avoid being left alone together, and yet each unceasingly watched the movements of the other.

Meanwhile, out in the world life swept merrily on, entertainment followed upon entertainment in pleasure-seeking Venice, and Irene and her friend plunged deep into the tide of gaieties. The young nobility of Venice thronged about these two beautiful women like bees about the roses. Wherever they were seen they were surrounded; whenever they made their appearance they were fêted.

Ritta, the bewitching Ferrara maiden, seemed to consider this brilliant career as the summit of happiness; she charmed every one by her playfulness and irresistible grace of manner, whilst one only approached her friend with a certain shyness.

A breath of tender melancholy never left the dazzlingly beautiful countenance of Irene, in spite of all the pleasures and the homage by which she was surrounded; she took no pains to conceal even for a moment how greatly she preferred a conversation with grave, intellectual men, to the sports and dancing of the young people, and it was indeed a strange sight to see this glorious young creature amidst a group of renowned savans or hoary statesmen, taking part in their discourses, whilst those of her own age around her amused themselves in quite a different way.

The artists too, crowded about Irene di Spilemberga, her immense talent for both painting and music excited the liveliest astonishment, and the fact that the great Titian, who for years had refused to take lady pupils, taught her, made her the object of much attention.

One can imagine nothing more lovely than when this young creature sang a simple madrigal, and accompanied her voice with her lute. It was said, too, that most of these lovely melodies, as well as the charming words, were of her own creation. Ritta's far more powerful voice and more pretentious style of singing might compare with that of her friend as the trill of a prima donna upon the stage with the sound of a little bell which rings out an ave, and whose resonance upon a still evening floats over the sea. The one demanded and received continual applause; to the other, one listened with folded hands.

In spite of the constant gaieties, the painting lessons in the Palazzo Spilemberga met with no interruptions, and Irene made the most wondrous progress under the guidance of her renowned master.

These peaceful hours seemed to have become a necessity to the life of both master and pupil. Titian felt a strange restlessness when the hour approached which called him to the Palazzo Spilemberga, and

nothing, not even his work, from which heretofore no earthly power could have torn him, would detain him even for a moment.

"It is strange, how entirely her wonderful talent enslaves me," he would often murmur, as though apologising to himself for his eagerness. And when, urged on by this restlessness, he reached the studio of the signora before the appointed time, he felt relieved to find that he was always expected, always waited for, just as though he were after the time. She always met him at the door, smiling and eager, holding out both hands with the exclamation "At last!" and her colour would always rise at his greeting.

The talent of this young Venetian maiden was indeed of no ordinary nature, and Titian said to her one day: "What a pity it is that you were born a patrician, and not a poor girl, for then you would have become a great painter."

"Can I not be one as it is, since I now have you to guide me?"

"No, for you have too many other things to think about—things of which you have been accustomed to think your whole life long. Besides, to be perfectly open with you, you are far too beautiful to paint yourself; you were formed to be painted; God sent you upon earth—for us!"

She turned slowly towards him, an enraptured flush overspreading both cheeks and brow.

"Do you really and truly find me beautiful, Titian Vercelli?" she whispered. "Speak! look at me—be truthful!"

He hesitated to raise his eyes to her face. What was it that with so heavy a hand weighed down his eyelids? "You should not ask me about such things," he said, and his voice sounded almost hard; then he raised his eyes.

She stood before him, one hand resting upon the easel, and the other holding the painting stick, and in her face shone a strange light. She wore a long black velvet robe—a style of dress she seemed particularly to love—and was in the fullest glory of her wonderful beauty.

He looked long upon her—an infinite ecstasy and deep pain seemed to rend his soul and shoot like a stream of fire through his veins; a wild ardour seized him and threatened to suffocate him; he gasped, as though for breath, and murmured: "For what purpose, Irene? Have mercy upon me! You play an unworthy game with me!"

He strode to the window, and pressed his burning brow against the cool window pane.

Had Irene heard these strange words? Titian could not tell, for when he finally turned towards her, she stood calmly before her easel and painted; and yet, when he parted from her with a hard-sought composure, she smiled upon him with an expression he had never seen in her face before. He went home as one in a dream.

When the passion of an unhappy love enters the hearts of the

young, it is like a violent south wind, which, with its warm breath, sweeps down the grass and flowers, and bows to the ground the young trees; but new blossoms soon open their little eyes upon the same stem, and the grass and the trees raise their heads only too soon. But does such a love seize the heart of one advanced in life, it is like the destructive hurricane, which sweeps over meadow and forest like the destroying angel, and the places over which it roars remain waste and barren to the end of time.

And could Titian Vercelli love in vain?

## II.

It was upon the evening of the very same day that the great master had parted with such deep emotion from his pupil that a gondola glided over the canal and wended its way towards the Island of Murano.

The charming Ritta leaned back upon the cushions in the most captivating position, and played with the little velvet mask she had just removed from her burning face. Opposite her sat Orazio Vercelli, holding in his hands the Signora's black fan. There were no traces of merriment in the maiden's face this time; she was troubled and tearful.

"Now, then, I will tell you the sad history I promised you," she at last began softly; "but you cannot help me, and therefore it is absurd to speak to you about it. Besides, who knows but that Irene might never forgive me if she should find out that I had betrayed her secret to you, of all others. Be quiet though—don't interrupt me. I know that I have done very wrong to come out here alone with you, for people say that you are a very bad fellow"—and here the old roguish smile played about the mouth for a moment—"but my friend is dearer to me than aught else, and I could not help trying if you could advise me what is to be done about her! I think I might make use of you for that!"

Saying this, she cast such bewitching glances upon him from behind the velvet mask which she had raised in the air as though to hide her face, that Orazio could hardly contain himself.

"You learned this morning that in three days I must go back to Ferrara. I saw how much this pained you. Well, but you do not know why I must go, so listen! I leave this beautiful, lovely Venice, where I would rather be a servant than be the most distinguished lady in Ferrara, because I cannot live alone with this horrid old Ursula, and next week my poor, gentle Irene enters upon her novitiate with the Sisters of the Order of the Heart of Jesus."

"Irene di Spilemberga enter a cloister!" exclaimed the deeply-shocked Orazio.

"It is precisely as I tell you," replied the beauty. "This resolution delights her stingy old aunt not a little."

"Since when has this wretched idea taken possession of so young a soul? Oh, Ritta, what a thought! If you should ever——"

"I cannot comprehend it!" she replied, shaking the dainty little head. "A cloister! To bury one's self alive—think of it!" And she shuddered so that she scarcely seemed conscious that Orazio, in the deepest sympathy, had seized both her hands and was covering them with kisses. Not for quite a little while did she tear herself hastily and proudly away, and after a moment's pause, said:

"But you are mistaken if you think my poor Irene has had the idea of entering a convent from childhood. She was a happy little thing, almost as free and careless as I, only she commenced very early to paint, was always eager for knowledge, and would sit for hours at the feet of the grave Abbé who educated us, and ask him about a thousand things, the answers to which I never had patience to wait to hear. Once, about a year ago, my father, in whose house she was brought up—for she lost her parents when she was a very little child—took us both on a journey to Florence. I almost died of ennui there, to tell the truth; for there was not a soul to laugh and sing with, and I had always been accustomed to have someone. Irene, on the other hand, visited with my father all the painting galleries of the city, and never wearied of telling me about all the beauties and splendours she had seen; indeed, she has often sat upon my bed until late in the night, telling me about all kinds of pictures and statues, and never noticing how often I fell asleep over her descriptions. One day she came home to me strangely excited; she only spoke in broken sentences, looked like one inspired, and would see and hear nothing more. When I asked my father the reason of this change, he smiled and told me that she had just seen a painting by Titian Vercelli, and it was that which had so deeply moved her—it was the celebrated 'Christi della Moneta.' Upon our return to Ferrara she sent at once for her teacher, and trembling with feverish excitement, told him about the painting. The next day she fell ill, and lay on her bed for nearly three months; but was patient as a saint, and beautiful as an angel upon her couch of suffering. As soon as she had recovered, she told first the Abbé, her friend, and then all of us, calmly and composedly, that it was her intention to take the veil in Venice, in the Convent of the Sisters of the 'Heart of Jesus.' She expressed at the same time a singular wish—she desired first to become the pupil for a short time of the man whose 'Christ' had awakened in her the resolution to sacrifice her youth in a convent. How surprised and shocked we all were at this unlooked-for resolution, you can readily believe. I myself was horrified at my own dear friend. All who were near and dear to her tried to deter the last of the celebrated race of the Spilembergas from this unnatural design; even the stern Abbé besought her not to bury her youth and beauty so early, but in vain. Gently, but firmly, calmly and sweetly, she resisted our admonitions, entreaties

and tears. My father at last gave way, but only on condition that she would first spend six months in pleasure-loving Venice. He, no doubt, hoped thus to put aside her morbid longing. She gave him the required promise with a cheerful smile. It was arranged that I was to go with her and use every means to work upon her mind, so that all the attractions and perfections of the world should leave their impress. Now my task is done, the six months are at an end. Ah, me! for weeks past I have lavished entreaties and tears without number upon her, but she remains unmoved; and to-day that hypocritical old Ursula reminded me of my journey, with her malicious grin.

"Now you know what troubles me—us all, in fact. Say, do you see any means of rescue, any glimmer of hope? For some time past I have believed that those flowers with which an unknown hand adorns her studio every morning meant that a passionate lover was at hand—a lover often works wonders—but the time is passing rapidly away, and no lover makes his appearance."

The pretty Ritta hid her face and sobbed aloud.

The young painter was much affected by this surprising narration, but much more so by the tears of the little syren who had long since enchained both heart and mind, and threatened to hold them captive for ever. He, therefore, devoted all his energies to consoling the fair weeper, in which undertaking he so far succeeded that, in the course of an hour, when, arrived at the Piazzetta, the charming Ritta glided from the gondola, she turned upon the moon and upon her beloved so bright a face that neither could wish any greater happiness than to gaze upon it.

It was not until he had lost sight of the object of his adoration that he again thought upon Irene di Spilemberga and the Convent of the Sisters of the Heart of Jesus, and then without further delay he hastened to his father's house.

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It was at a most unusually early hour the next day that the master appeared before his pupil's door. His noble countenance bore traces of the deepest emotion, and the hand which he held out at greeting trembled. Irene looked anxiously at him.

"What has happened to you?" she asked hastily.

"I have heard that something is going to happen to me," he replied gloomily; "and it depends upon *you* alone to spare me from an inexpressible sorrow."

She pointed her little hand towards a seat, and at once took her place beside him; but every trace of colour had vanished from her face as she sat waiting for him to speak.

"I know all, Irene; I know what cruel thoughts my 'Christ' gave to you, and I mourn the day, the hour when this picture saw the light," he began, in the deepest emotion.

"Oh, Titian Vercelli," she cried, turning upon him her radiant face, "it was not your artist's soul that spoke those words! How could

you ever for a moment, for the sake of anything upon earth, repent having created such a picture as this one? Had you created nothing in a whole lifetime but this one form—painted nothing besides this divine being with His glorified face, His holy, wondrous hand—you must still have been called the master of all masters! Day and night this face has stood before my eyes, and I have ever seen the hand which none on earth dare touch, but whose call all must follow when it beckons.”

She ceased and drew a long breath. Titian, however, raised his eyes, as one in a dream, on the beaming face of the young maiden. With a strange sweetness the inspired words from these lips fell upon his heart. He who had ever enjoyed so much honour and glory, who was always fêted wherever he appeared, felt as though he had never received such commendation in his whole artist life as this; yet it was commendation of an early work, one of which he was less proud than of his later ones.

“And yet I wish that you—you of all others—had never seen it!” he cried, at last, in passionately mournful tones.

“Do not say so, you know not what a benefit you have conferred upon me by this form. From your ‘Christ’ I first learned voluntarily to bow the knee! My heart had unconsciously dreamed of such a Messiah. I had obscurely longed for such a vision. I could never pray to the dying, bleeding martyr they showed me; my whole heart and soul revolted against the sufferer upon the cross. Even as a child I would turn my head anxiously away when they held to my lips the image of the crucified Saviour. But your radiant ‘Christ’ is my Christ. As soon as I saw Him I understood the words: ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’ Your ‘Christ’ is a Conqueror! No one could withstand His power!”

“And this Christ has bidden you bury this rich existence, this fulness of youth and beauty in a convent?”

“How can you be affected by that?” she said, softly and tremblingly.

“Say rather, how dare I be affected by that! Oh, the misery, oh, the sorrow, that I am no longer the Titian in the meridian of life, in the fulness of youth and vigour! Woe is me that I dare no longer wrestle and contend for what is to me more worth than aught else upon earth—your love. Alas, I dare do nothing but bear a mad, passionate love down with me to the grave!”

The great master had spoken these words in the most violent emotion, and now he covered his face with both hands.

Then a little hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a sweet voice breathed close to his cheek; “Wherefore wrestle and contend for what you have long possessed? Oh, Titian Vercelli, you love me! God is merciful. I know now that I may live for you and with you! Listen well—I say live!”

Slowly his hands sunk; she stood there before him overpowered



with joy, radiant with happiness, blushing as a bride, and in jubilant tones she repeated: "I may live for you, for you love me. I will live for you, for I have loved you ever since I have seen your Christ."

Then he knelt down before the beautiful, young and inspired maiden, and said: "Oh, thou my last and eternal spring, God bless thee upon earth and in heaven!" And never have mortal eyes seen a more glowing language of love than in those dark eyes which were now bent upon Irene di Spilemberga.

For a whole week all Venice talked of the strange betrothal of the proud patrician with the celebrated master, of this singular alliance of a beauteous maiden of eighteen with a man of three-score years. "Art has brought them together," the people said, and they eagerly awaited the first appearance in public of this odd couple.

That Orazio, Titian's son, should have gained the heart and hand of the roguish Ritta, attracted hardly any attention after this strange occurrence. Was there anything strange and unaccountable in the fact of two young people loving one another? And even though Ritta was the daughter of a nobleman, in those days a true artist was on a level with the highest nobility, and a father would not readily have denied his daughter's hand to a son of Titian Vercelli.

These two children were happy—so completely and entirely happy that they could easily rejoice over the happiness of others, and they hailed with joy the love of Titian and Irene, which so unexpectedly and so effectually had destroyed the dreams of convent life of the most beautiful woman in Venice.

The charming little Ferrara maiden amused herself highly over Ursula's helpless rage, which, upon Irene's unlooked-for change of resolution, broke forth without bounds.

The Signora acted as one insane, and declared, trembling with rage that she would never give her consent to such an absurd marriage—spoke of the wanton breach of such sacred vows, of the great sin which would surely be punished by heaven—and was finally carried to her room in violent hysterics. The same evening she called her niece to her bedside, and made an attempt to save this young soul from destruction in an altogether different manner than at first. With a languid voice and fleeting breath, she exhausted her vocabulary of tender expressions to move the young maiden to remain true to her former resolutions. She spoke of her own speedy death, and of her peaceful dying hour if she could leave her dearest earthly possession—the daughter of her beloved brother—in the calm of a convent life, free from the dangers and sorrows of the world; and to give a deeper impress to her words, she shed a few hypocritical tears.

But in vain. Irene remained firm and unshaken.

"Do not trouble yourself on my account," she replied to all this, with an angelic smile; "I do not fear life. It lies stretched before me like a sunny garden—for am I not loved by the only man upon

earth for whose love I have longed? And I will live for this love. Death and death only has power to separate me from my betrothed."

When Irene, with a calm, gentle step, had left her aunt's chamber, there arose from behind Ursula's bed the gaunt form of a young priest, who had been kneeling there during the whole interview. He approached the couch of his penitent, who was almost fainting with rage, and murmured—"Be calm, the rich dowry of the last of the Spilembergas shall not escape the convent of the Sisters of the Heart of Jesus. Only give free scope to my energies; she shall not live for her love! The father shall never stretch forth his hand to pluck a flower for which the son would renounce his eternal salvation. You have a mighty rival, Titian Vercelli, but you shall never know who has crossed your path, or whose hand has been raised to render your hopes vain!"

It was not for three days after this that Titian Vercelli once more entered the studio of his young betrothed. It was she herself who had besought him not to come sooner, for Ursula's illness seemed an alarming one, and Irene never left her aunt's side. So it was not until the morning of the fourth day that the lovers were clasped in each other's arms.

"I wear your flowers to-day, beloved," she said brightly; "to-day for the first time I dare openly do it. Only see how joyously they bloom over my heart. Their fragrance is more powerful to-day than usual; it almost overpowers me. Ursula herself told me to wear these flowers, which were brought to me whilst I sat in her chamber. She is kind and good this morning; she feels now that there is indeed but one power on earth or in heaven which can part us two, and that is—death!"

She looked most wondrously beautiful as she spoke thus, and Titian stood lost in blissful dreams.

"Ah, thou brilliant star, wilt thou indeed condescend to be the wife of a painter? Thou young rose, wilt thou indeed wed the snow? Wilt thou indeed bring to my soul a spring such as it has never known?" he asked softly.

"The star will shine upon thee until it is extinguished, the rose will bloom for thee alone until it—dies! But, Titian, for the Madonna's sake—what is the matter with these flowers?—they take away my breath!" she cried, with sudden alarm. "Take them away, beloved!"

Her voice here gave way, a mortal paleness overspread the pure face, she pressed her hand convulsively against her heart, and Titian caught the tottering form in his arms.

Lord of mercy, what is this? An icy coldness crept through her body, and Titian felt her grow rigid in his arms. With a wild cry he tore the flowers from her bosom and dashed them away. Then he bore his motionless darling to a couch and called for help. Ritta hastened in and cast herself at the feet of her friend, who, with closed

eyes, seemed to be sleeping her last sleep. An expression of infinite pain hovered about the silent mouth.

Before half an hour had elapsed, all the most celebrated surgeons of Venice were assembled in Irene's chamber.

The day stole away, and in spite of all efforts the benumbed form gave no signs of life. In the ensuing night, the windows of the Spilemberga Palazzo were as brilliantly illuminated as though a company of merry friends lingered within. And there was, indeed, a large company assembled within the pompous walls; not, however, to celebrate a fête, but to watch, to weep, and to pray for the pure young being who, so suddenly singled out by the finger of death, lay there like a broken lily.

Signora Ursula, too, it was said, was nigh unto death with terror and grief; her attendants admitted no one to her chamber but her confessor, who prayed by her bedside.

And when midnight was past, and Irene still lay in this fearful, rigid slumber, the physicians shook their heads and looked significantly at one another; then there arose in the sick chamber, and stole from mouth to mouth through the halls, the fearful decree—"She must die!" Anxious faces were to be seen all around, sobs and tears broke forth on every side; without, on the steps, thronged the women and children, and mourned for their good angel.

This night it was for the first time made manifest how dear Irene di Spilemberga was to all of both high and low degree. Within the apartment where the dying girl lay, however, all was silent as beseems the chamber of death. A night lamp cast its dull light upon the maiden's faultless form. Her golden hair fell in rich waves upon the pillow, the outlines of her profile showed a marble-like repose, and the marble-like purity of an antique statue.

Beside her, on a low seat, holding her cold right hand in both his, sat the great master, Titian Vercelli. In his deathly pale visage there seemed to be no living feature but the eyes, which, fixed and tearless, hung upon the lineaments of his beloved. At the head of the bed stood the surgeons; and at the foot, all bathed in tears, lay Ritta. Close beside Titian knelt in silent prayer Irene's confessor, the grey-haired Padre Andreo.

Not one of all those assembled here, however, could find an explanation for this fearful occurrence. Some spoke of heart disease, others of poison. But who, *who* could lay a destructive hand upon this masterwork of the Creator? The food of which the maiden had partaken on the morning of the dreadful day was examined, and found perfectly free from anything injurious; of a glass of wine, however, of which the attendants testified she had sipped a few drops in Ursula's room at her aunt's request, Signora Ursula, when asked for the remainder of the wine, professed to know nothing; and the flowers which Irene had worn that morning, Titian's gift, which he had sent to the Palazzo at an early hour by

his gondolier, as was his wont, were strangely enough nowhere to be found.

The first rays of morning trembled through the apartment; its rosy light penetrated the silken curtains, and fell upon the silent form of the beautiful statue. Suddenly a shudder ran through her frame, like the statue of Memnon, which shudders at the first kiss of the sun. A faint cry of joy escaped Titian's lips. Slowly the lovely eyes opened, and slowly and searchingly looked around, until they were fixed upon the master's face. A beam of intelligence quivered through the rigid features, the sweet lips parted, and slowly but distinctly she said:

"They have invoked to their aid that power which alone could part us—death is at hand! But neither our enemies nor death can part us for ever, and I say now, as upon the first morning, '*A rivederci*,' my beloved."

And as Titian in the wildest grief wound his arms around his darling, and she gently dropped her head upon his bosom, the glimmer of a beatified smile stole over the face of the dying girl.

"Your 'Christ' beckons to me with His sacred hand," she said. "I see Him!" Then the eyes closed, a deep sigh rent the bosom, and all was over.

"Requiem aeternam dona eis domine," prayed the priest.

When Titian Vercelli, after long hours of mute, inconsolable grief which he had passed beside the couch of death, finally bade farewell to the beloved corpse and quitted the chamber, all who met him were horrified at the wonderful change in the appearance of the great master. The breath of winter had suddenly touched this vigorous body and mighty soul. Titian's dark hair had turned grey from the grief of this one night, his eyes were sunken, his bearing that of a man who has wandered far, and now, in the weariness of death, can scarcely drag one heavy foot after the other. Silently he strode past the strange forms who reverently made room for him. In the last antechamber he saw his youngest son on his knees, a wreath of roses in his hands, his head resting upon the cushion of a lounge, and there from very weariness he had fallen asleep. Titian stood silently beside him for a moment, and then gently touched his shoulder. Orazio started, gazed a moment upon his father, then seizing his hands and covering them with kisses, burst into tears. Then he sprang up, he asked no questions, but throwing his arm around him he drew him slowly towards the door. But Titian tore himself away, looked wildly around him, and pushed away his son's arm.

"Let me alone," he commanded; "do not follow me! Do you know, boy, that I have seen my last spring pass away? Go, my child; to-morrow you may look after me; only leave me alone to-day!"

And whilst Orazio mournfully stepped back, and the master walked away as one in a dream, the curtain which separated Ursula's apartment from the rest was pushed aside. The chamber was brilliantly lighted, and involuntarily the young man's eyes turned towards it. Signora Ursula, who was supposed to be sick unto death, knelt in her oratory at the far end of the chamber, with the air of hypocritical contrition upon her face, and it was her confessor whose hand had just pushed aside the folds of the curtain.

Suddenly Orazio sent forth one shriek of horror. The priest's cowl had fallen back upon his shoulders, a stream of light fell upon the hard profile of Pomponio. A dull, heavy flame broke from his eyes, a diabolical smile hovered about the delicate lips. "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" he murmured triumphantly, fixing his eyes upon his brother. Then all vanished as a dream—the curtains were drawn together again.

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All Venice for years retained the belief that the beautiful and renowned Irene di Spilemberga had died from poison, which some said she had been made to inhale from a bouquet of flowers; others, to take in a glass of wine, to prevent her marriage with the great master; but the obscurity which hung over the deed was never entirely cleared away. The deceased became a saint in the mouth of the people, and poets and artists never wearied of glorifying her in verse and painting. Do we not find among Tasso's Sonnets one which chants her praises? Twenty years after her death, there appeared a collection of verses of which she was the subject.

If, then, this pure being was not even forgotten by the great fickle people, how sacred must her memory have been to those who were near to her! Titian Vercelli, in losing her, had indeed seen his last spring pass away. His body lived on, it is true, his mighty soul still worked for his art; but he was often seized with fits of the deepest dejection, when for days at a time he would avoid the society of his friends. He surrounded himself by all the paintings done by Irene's hand, and found in the contemplation of these pure creations of a rare talent his greatest, although a deeply melancholy joy. The house of Orazio, who had led home his Ritta, was his favourite resort, and his eldest grandchild, who received the name of Irene, was the idol of his heart. Orazio worked very industriously, and, to his father's great delight, his pictures were unanimously admired, and he was paid well for them, too.

The great master himself worked more assiduously than ever; it seemed as though he wished to withdraw from self by the severity of his labours. He also undertook numerous journeys to try to distract his thoughts; but he was always seized by an unconquerable home-sickness, and would return quickly to Venice. His last painting was a portrait of Irene. He painted his beloved from memory; but this work was seen by no eye save his until after his death. It excels

in splendour of colouring and perfection of style even that lovely picture of the beloved Lavinia.

A few years after Irene's death, Ursula di Spilemberga disappeared behind the walls of the Ursulinian Convent, and at the same time it was reported in Venice that, because of a fearful suspicion, Pomponio Vercelli had been expelled from his office.

His father and brother never saw him again; but after the death of the two his name was once more mentioned with horror and disgust. He contended in the most disgraceful manner with Orazio's widow and children for a share in the patrimony of his father and brother, and finally, after a suit of many years, gained his point.

In his ninety-seventh year, Titian received and entertained in his Palazzo King Henry III. of France, with his entire suite, in the most brilliant manner. Two years after this, the renowned master died of the plague. Those about him forsook him and fled from the loathsome disease. One only remained true, and accompanied him himself through the valley of the shadow of death to the land of eternal spring. When people came to remove Titian's dead body from the deserted house, they found two corpses instead of one. At the foot of the dead master's couch, almost in the folds of his scarlet mantle, lay—Orazio.

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#### MY HEART'S HAVEN.

FAR beyond the city's riot,  
Far beyond each crowded mart,  
Smiles a hamlet quaint and quiet,  
Home and haven of my heart!  
Far beyond these dismal alleys,  
And these tortuous ways of stone,  
There it dreams, 'mid hills and valleys,  
To the noiseful world unknown.

All its brooks, 'mid verdant passes,  
Laugh and tumble, gleam and toss;  
All its lanes are green with grasses,  
All its banks are soft with moss;  
All its gardens breathe of roses,  
All its hedges bloom like bow'rs;  
All its meads are lit with posies,  
All its pathways starr'd with flow'rs.

Fairest cradle of my childhood!  
Crown'd with amethystine hills;  
Cloth'd with dusky moor and wild-wood,  
Gemm'd with sparkling crystal rills;



Still in fancy I behold thee !  
Still I dream of thee, and sigh  
For the peace that doth enfold thee  
'Neath the summer's radiant sky.

Still I haunt the lichen'd fountains,  
Where my earliest footsteps trod,  
Still I see thy misty mountains,  
'Neath the golden stars of God ;  
Still I roam each dell and dingle,  
Linger in each sylvan spot,  
And for ever meet and mingle  
With thy faces unforget !

Ah ! those days of golden weather,  
When I rambled, still a child,  
Plucking 'mid the gorse and heather  
Purple berries sweet and wild !  
When I sought the emerald cresses,  
And the star-worts where they bloom  
In the woodland's dim recesses,  
In its green and golden gloom.

When the wild thyme near the sedges  
Made a fragrance at my feet,  
And I cull'd from hawthorn hedges  
Fairy blossoms faintly sweet ;  
When the harebells blue and slender,  
And the daffodils of gold,  
And the foxglove's regal splendour  
Fill'd me with delight untold.

When I watch'd from mossy pillows,  
How the shining river roll'd  
Onward under sunlit willows,  
With its rhythmic tale of old ;  
Onward to the mighty ocean,  
As by magic borne along,  
With an ever-changeeful motion  
And a never-ending song.

Ah ! my heart is sick and jaded,  
I am yearning for the balm  
Of a childhood that hath faded,  
With its pleasures sweet and calm.  
And for ever 'mid the clamour,  
On these pavements hard and grey,  
I am dreaming of the glamour  
On that hamlet far away !

ALICE MACKAY.



## MRS. RASHLEIGH'S MISTAKE.

BY LADY VIRGINIA SANDARS.

## I.

"**F**LIRTING with philanthropy! It is the fashion nowadays thus to occupy vacant hours."

These were words often addressed with playful irony to Mrs. Rashleigh, by those who desired to throw cold water on the exertions of one more energetic than themselves, or who, perchance, held higher views of life's grave responsibilities.

Whatever opinions others might pass on her actions, Mrs. Rashleigh was certainly not flirting with philanthropy. She was an earnest and indefatigable friend of the poor and wretched. This fact did not, however, preclude her from often experiencing considerable lassitude and mental discouragement when her arduous labours of genuine love were over for the day.

It is a cold, dreary evening of early November. A depressing fog has reigned supreme all day, and having changed her soberer working attire for a very becoming but simple mauve teagown, it is with undoubted satisfaction that Madeline Rashleigh sinks into an armchair, and, while gazing into the bright fire that casts fitful, mysterious lights over her pretty room, gives herself up to reflections wholly at variance with the stern, practical work upon which she has been engaged.

That her meditations are by no means displeasing is evinced by the smile that occasionally flits over her face. But as the fire gets lower so does the happy look die out. Her expression becomes grave, indeed a little troubled. An organ, grinding a melancholy air outside with obstinate persistency, irritates her nerves. She rises, closes the shutters and draws the curtains as she murmurs softly :

"He is later than usual. If he delays much longer my resolution will weaken. Ah! will it not break down utterly in his presence, when I hear his dear young voice, feel the clasp of his loving hand?"

She moves towards the fireplace, stirs the fire into renewed brightness, and then gazes at herself long and earnestly in the mirror above. It reflects back, if not a face of regular beauty, one essentially interesting and full of pathetic expression, for upon Madeline Rashleigh's face sorrow has laid its chastening hand with no light touch. Yet in its burning passage it has ennobled the countenance it has left so heavily marked.

"Yes, they are there, undeniably there," she whispered softly ;

"crow's feet about my eyes. Silent monitors to remind me I am ten years older than he is. I must, I will be firm."

Notwithstanding these brave words, her grey eyes filled with tears, and were still clinging to their long black lashes, when a gay young voice, close to her, said mockingly:

"'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' says the Preacher. Sweetest of women, I am relieved to find you are not wholly above the weaknesses of ordinary mortals."

"How dare you come into my drawing-room unannounced, most audacious of men?" retorted Mrs. Rashleigh, dashing the tears from her eyes, while a brilliant colour rushed into her usually pale face, greatly enhancing its beauty.

"I would dare anything to find myself one instant sooner in your loved presence."

"Supposing I had had visitors!" She moved towards the bell.

"I ascertained you were alone. Do not ring for the lamp." He laid a detaining grasp on her hand. "This firelight is infinitely cosier and more sociable, and I have so much to say to you."

She silently assented and, withdrawing her hand from his, sat down on the sofa. She also preferred the fitful firelight; it helped to conceal an emotion she found it difficult to control.

He placed himself near her and his voice shook with agitation as he said with rapid vehemence: "Mrs. Rashleigh—Madeline—you know I love you. Can you return my love? To-day you promised to give me a definite answer. I can and will no longer remain in suspense."

"And if I end that suspense—if I acknowledge I love you—what follows?" she asked a little despairingly.

"What follows? Can you ask? You will promise to be my wife, and I—I shall then be the happiest man in the world!"

There was a tone of triumph in the handsome young speaker's voice that thrilled through Mrs. Rashleigh's whole being, and she repeated low and softly:

"To be your wife!" Then, looking up, she said feverishly and quickly: "Shall I tell you how I was occupied when you accused me of vanity just now. I was counting the wrinkles on my face. I had just discovered my first grey hairs. Philip, I am ten years older than you. Forget you have asked me to be your wife—for I must."

He laughed scornfully. "What has age to say to love? I neither see the wrinkles nor the grey hairs; they are the creation of your imagination. I love you, and"—he hesitated—"you love me, you cannot, may not deny it."

"I do not deny it," she answered bravely. He seized her hand, pressed it to his lips with passionate fervour and strove to throw his arm round her. But she drew back, saying: "I acknowledged that I love you; nevertheless I will never marry you except upon my own terms."

"I agree to them beforehand."

"You are imprudent. Philip, we have, I acknowledge, passed six very happy months in each other's society——"

"To me they have been months spent in Heaven. Sweet Madeline, your influence over me has been that of a guardian angel; you have taught me to respect myself."

She smiled with pleasure, though she replied :

"And in another six months will your feelings have undergone no change, think you?"

"None, none, I swear!"

"Ah, Philip, men are often constant only in inconstancy. And I have suffered too much in my first most unhappy marriage, to risk by inconsiderate haste a second failure."

"Make the proof. I will triumph over all," he whispered.

"And if it ends in failure, alas! where shall I be with youth, hope, and faith all fled together?"

Her voice trembled with emotion as she gave utterance to so dreary a possibility, and she continued :

"Philip, the past six months will ever remain enshrined in my heart with thankful remembrance. But I am so much older than you. I was told the other day I looked old enough to be your mother."

"Bah! by a jealous woman! Is this your excuse for refusing me? You are cold and heartless, Mrs. Rashleigh. True love does not stop to calculate the possibilities, or rather the impossibilities, of a distant future."

"And you are unfair to me and yourself. I do not refuse you, Philip. Come back again this day six months with the same ardour of love in your heart, with the same words, truly spoken, on your lips, and see what my answer will prove."

"The same, the same, six months, six years hence! You will find me ever the same. Most mistrustful of women, as long as I breathe I must love you," he exclaimed fervently as he again passionately kissed her hands. He dared not venture on any fonder caress. She was so calm, so passionless; an icicle, he angrily reflected. Yet at this very moment Madeline Rashleigh felt a great longing, not to fling herself into her youthful lover's arms, like the true modern heroine, but to take his curly head between the hands he was kissing, and in maternal fashion lay it on her heart. She had almost a mother's desire to comfort him for the very disappointment she was, in his interests much more than in her own, inflicting on him. And when raising his eyes to her he said falteringly :

"But during my probationary ordeal, you will of course render life endurable by permitting me to see you every day?"

"This, I fear, will be impossible," she replied with considerable trepidation.

He started and she with difficulty braced herself to give the final blow.

"For to-morrow I am going abroad with my invalid aunt, and I forbid you to follow me. You have promised your uncle to stand at the approaching general election. You must also enter fully into society. Cultivate the companionship of women younger than myself and compare them with me. If you abide this test, I faithfully promise to become your wife at the end of six months."

Mrs. Rashleigh rose from the sofa as she finished speaking. She did not wish Captain Northcote to perceive how deeply she was disturbed by the ordeal she had decided on imposing upon herself as well as upon him. Her capacity for loving was even stronger than her desire to be loved. She had never had children and was an only child herself. Her marriage had not only been a miserable failure, but was also mingled with deep shame for him whose name she bore. The slumbering but rich harmonies of Madeline Rashleigh's heart had never been called into play by true reciprocity of sympathy until she had made acquaintance with Captain Northcote. Yet until he declared himself her lover she believed her feelings for this attractive, joyous young officer to be purely of a maternal nature. His love, against her better judgment, had in fact kindled hers. Yet in order to prove the depth and sincerity of his feelings for her, she knew she was acting rightly and wisely in putting them to a severe test.

"Cruel! You are pitilessly cruel. You cannot love me truly," exclaimed Captain Northcote vehemently.

"I am proving the sincerity of my affection, foolish man, by the way I am now acting. Whatever may be the result, you will live to thank me."

She held out her hand, he would not appear to see it, but stretched out his arms towards her in mute appeal. Her heart bounded. She felt herself to be hard and cruel, but at that moment the hall door bell rang violently and she observed quickly:

"Here are other visitors. Oh, Philip, six months is but a short probation for faithful hearts. We can correspond as often as you wish."

"Be it so," he exclaimed. "I accept the test."

He made a step forward, but whatever might be his intention it was frustrated by the entrance of the unwelcome visitor. Seizing his hat, Captain Northcote rushed so impetuously from the room that he cannoned right against the incoming intruder, a tall, middle-aged gentleman of grave, imposing presence, General Sir James Maxwell, K.C.B.

"Hullo, uncle, is it you? I beg you a thousand pardons," he exclaimed hurriedly. Waiting for no reply he flew down the stairs murmuring: "What on earth can my venerable uncle come here for? She never told me she knew him."

At the age of fifty we appear venerable to buoyant five-and-twenty.

After greeting Mrs. Rashleigh and gently placing the hand he momentarily held to his lips, Sir James observed:

"I had no idea you were acquainted with my harum-scarum nephew. Has he been making you the *confidante* of his latest love affair? He has had many——"

So absorbed was Sir James with his own hopes and long-repressed desires with reference to her he had come to see, that the emotional state in which Mrs. Rashleigh's late visitor had left her at first escaped his notice. When he did observe it, he attributed it solely to his own sudden advent. Partially it certainly was.

Evading any reply to his last remark, though slightly disconcerted thereby, she said:

"I am rejoiced to see you again, my dear, kind friend. I had no idea you had returned to London."

"I only arrived this morning, and as yet have not seen a soul except your fair self. How much better"—he hesitated—"and younger you look than when we parted a year ago!"

"Ah, that dreadful time when you were so infinitely good to me! What a debt of gratitude I owe you! How can I ever repay you for your unselfish generosity to me in the past?"

"Not quite such unselfish generosity as you imagine, dear Mrs. Rashleigh, for I am here to demand payment with interest for what deserves none."

"Payment! How can I repay you for having saved my unfortunate erring husband's name from public and eternal disgrace?" There was a sob in her voice as she spoke. "For having saved me from despair?"

"How can you repay me? Shall I tell you?" he said in a low voice of agitation. "By exchanging that name for mine, sweet, long-suffering Madeline, dearest of women. Will you be my wife?"

No word in response came from Mrs. Rashleigh's lips. All colour had faded out of her cheek. Such a prospect of assured happiness as now opened out before her had never crossed the wildest dreams she had formed for her future. To her Sir James had ever been the *beau idéal* of all that was most chivalrous and honourable. With him she knew her whole future life would be one of calm and certain happiness. He alone knew the painful, humiliating secrets of her past. At one time, she had even fancied she loved him too well. But he had not by word or deed fanned the rising flame in her heart into more vigorous life, nor had he let her perceive it was reciprocated. For lack of fuel that incipient love had died out. At least, so Mrs. Rashleigh thought. Now she knew she had made a mistake, and that that smouldering flame could be quickly rekindled—and she had promised herself to another! To one in whose constancy she placed no great faith. One whom she had accepted more—far more—from her yearning desire for sympathy; also to have some one to care for and cherish; than from any more subtle sentiment. She had been too impatient to taste long-delayed happiness.



Her prolonged silence alarmed Sir James, and he said gently: "Madeline, have you no answer for me?"

Then she exclaimed: "Can it be possible that you—noblest of men, bravest of warriors—can wish to marry a forger's wife, the widow of a man whose baseness to you, the friend of a lifetime, nearly caused your ruin?"

"Dearest Madeline, revert not to a dead and, by me, forgotten injury. You were, and remain, guiltless of all wrong," he smiled, "unless you reject me."

"And I must, I must," she cried out, bursting into tears, "for I have just accepted another!"

"Another! Ah, Madeline! And you love this other?"

"I suppose so," she replied helplessly, "as I have promised to be his wife on my return from the Continent—that is, if he remains faithful during the six months of my absence. And how can I disappoint the poor boy? He is so young! And he loves me so entirely!"

Sir James all but laughed outright. In a moment he guessed who this ardent young lover was, and was completely consoled. But he had no wish to be enlightened as to the truth of his surmise by Mrs. Rashleigh. With a smile he replied:

"At the end of six months, you say, my rival is to claim you. Well, I will also return at the close of his probation. If he remains faithful—and how could he prove otherwise?—I shall be at hand to give you away; if not, I have waited for happiness so long I can afford to wait another six months in hopes of your accepting me, as consoler, if he proves faithless. Farewell until then, dearest Madeline; for, whatever happens, so must you ever remain to me."

Sir James once more placed the hand he had taken in farewell to his lips and left the room. He was disappointed at the delay in his happiness, but by no means discouraged.

"She does not care a straw, it is easy to see, for that young scapegrace of a nephew of mine, and he has never remained faithful for six weeks to any woman," was his consoling reflection as he strode smilingly off to his club. "But then my sweet Madeline is so above all other women," he further reflected with a twinge of anxiety as to the results of the little plot already concocting in his astute brain.

## II.

THREE out of the six months appointed by Mrs. Rashleigh as a test of her younger lover's fidelity had elapsed. By the unabated ardency of his letters she knew that up to this period he had remained faithful; while, alas! she, day by day, realised more fully what a disastrous mistake hers had been. Sir James's image was ever present to her mind, and she could not disguise from herself that he, and he only, was

the true possessor of her heart. How could she have mistaken the motherly affection she accorded Captain Northcote for anything warmer? Yet, if he claimed the fulfilment of her promise, how could she break the poor boy's heart by failing him?

In the dilemma so sorely troubling her, Mrs. Rashleigh consulted a hairdresser regarding the possibility of his bleaching her abundant auburn tresses snowy white. This might give her so venerable an appearance as to disgust her young lover. Sir James, she fondly believed, would not mind any deterioration in her looks, however grievous it might be. The hairdresser's observation, "Madame, it would be a crime!" deterred her from accomplishing this temporary sacrifice. She also remembered that Sir James had once told her her hair was the most beautiful he had ever seen. She would not ruthlessly destroy its beauty yet awhile.

Shortly after coming to this wise decision, Mrs. Rashleigh imagined she detected a slight modification in the ardency of Captain Northcote's letters. A guilty joy filled her heart, slightly dashed by not having heard for a lengthened period from Sir James. Surely she was not going to fall between two stools and lose both her lovers at once! It seemed to the fair widow, on reflection, that Sir James had accepted her rejection so very placidly; perchance had even repented of ever having offered her his name. Under the pressure of this disagreeable possibility, Mrs. Rashleigh became low-spirited and irritable, and her invalid aunt, not finding her society so pleasant as heretofore, proposed an earlier return homewards—a proposal negatived by Mrs. Rashleigh, who testily observed that it was imperative she should remain at Nice for another couple of months at least.

In England the hunting-season was at its height. Sir James, who was a widower without children, had invited, on the plea of his great loneliness, his brother's only daughter, who was also an heiress, to spend some of the drearier months of winter with him. His nephew, Captain Northcote, passed his winter leave at Maxwell Hall, for it was situated in the best of the hunting shires, and he was always made a welcome guest by its master. He was astonished, however, at the increased warmth of his reception on the present occasion, while he remained spell-bound by the loveliness of Violet Maxwell, whom he had never before seen.

Considering that his attachment for Mrs. Rashleigh had rendered him invulnerable to the seductions of every other woman, he hailed her advent with much satisfaction, and quickly placed himself on terms of easy comradeship with this fair girl. She, being accustomed to much respectful homage, was considerably nettled, at first, by the free *insouciance* of his manner. When they are thrown together and alone, as days went by, she determined to make a conquest of one apparently so indifferent to her charms, but, gratifying reflection, also to her wealth. For Violet Maxwell, who was desirous to be loved for herself and not for her fortune, was very weary of the impecunious

young men who had persecuted her with undesired attentions from the moment she appeared in society, and whose attentions she believed to be entirely actuated by mercenary motives, beautiful though she knew herself to be.

Miss Maxwell was a bold and fearless rider, also a girl of considerable independence of spirit. Within a week of her arrival she had informed her uncle of her intention to follow the hounds at least three days a week. With a malicious twinkle in his eye, he rejoined that she was at perfect liberty to give rein to her inclinations, but under certain conditions. She must always be accompanied by either himself or his nephew.

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to give Miss Maxwell a lead any day," sedately observed Captain Northcote, though his pulses beat guiltily meanwhile.

"I hope you will not be too strict a chaperon. In any case, I can take excellent care of myself," demurely remarked Miss Maxwell, with heightened colour and inward joy.

Shortly afterwards, her horses having arrived, she appeared at breakfast ready equipped for the hunting field. As she commenced to pour out his coffee, Sir James looked up from the *Times*, in which he had hitherto been immersed, and exclaimed:

"My dear Violet, it is most unfortunate, but I am wholly incapacitated from accompanying you. This confounded old wound in my leg is causing me considerable pain this morning. It would be impossible for me to mount a horse, much less take a fence." He made a grimace, as though suffering the acutest agony, while Captain Northcote observed quickly:

"I am quite ready to take your place, sir, and escort Miss Maxwell; that is, if she will allow me."

A deep blush, a lightning glance of pleasure, were this young lady's sole reply.

"Then, dear Violet, in this case you will not lose your day's run, and my mind remains at rest as to your safety. You and Philip are, in a sort of way, cousins," carelessly said Sir James.

Half an hour later, as Captain Northcote was aiding the fair equestrian to mount her hunter, and taking a little unnecessary time over his pleasant office, Sir James observed:

"I say, Philip, you will see that she does not break her neck." Lowering his voice, he added impressively, "nor her heart. Remember, though you will not reveal the name of your *fiancée*, you have assured me you are an engaged man—a fact that renders your fitness to fulfil the office I relegate to you beyond question."

"There is no occasion to remind me of that which I never forget," sententiously replied Captain Northcote.

"Ah, ah! young man, you are already, if I am not mistaken, beginning to forget this interesting circumstance! My little plot works well! Three days since you have been to post a letter to

Nice!" murmured Sir James, and triumphantly chuckling as he re-entered the house with a nimbleness that wholly belied his asserted sufferings. He did not experience the slightest qualms of conscience with reference to his present nefarious course of action. He considered all was equally fair in love as in war. Then was he not acting in the true interests of all concerned; especially of the woman he had so long loved, and who had proved, to his perfect satisfaction, that she did not in truth care a button for his more youthful rival?

Zealously, and with the strong incentive of a passion long kept under restraint urging him on to victory, Sir James worked with unflinching ardour to win his love-battle and to make his victory a certainty.

As the season advanced, and when he could no longer plead his wound as an excuse, he still rarely went out with the hounds. In vain his friends rallied him on his laziness, accusing him of latent timidity, and asserting that the pusillanimity of old age was creeping over him. He only laughed in his sleeve at their taunting remarks, for every hour of his life he felt himself younger as the successful result of his scheming became more apparent. But suddenly he experienced a woeful check, for Captain Northcote proved in the end to be actuated by more chivalrous feelings than his uncle had given him credit for. Sir James had not calculated upon this.

Thrown daily and almost exclusively into the society of a perilously fascinating girl, Captain Northcote, after making futile efforts to avert this catastrophe, had indeed fallen desperately in love with Violet Maxwell. Honourably, but wholly in vain, he had striven to struggle against his rising passion. Yet day by day he failed, or forgot, to write to Mrs. Rashleigh; and, when he did write, his letters, to her infinite satisfaction, were ever more strained, less loverlike. As she perused them, she murmured joyfully: "His constancy is failing. He will himself free me."

But Philip Northcote was endowed with a nobler spirit than his uncle suspected. For Violet's riches he cared nothing; but realising, with guilty satisfaction, yet tempered by deep compunction, that she returned his affection, he decided, though too late, to fly from her presence. He would remain true to Mrs. Rashleigh. Notwithstanding this honourable decision, as he gazed into the depths of Violet's blue eyes, watched the delicate colour ever rise into her fair face on his approach, and compared her youthful, dazzling beauty with Mrs. Rashleigh's maturer charms, the comparison was not, alas! favourable to the latter. And, rushing from Violet's presence, he cried aloud in his despair and self-accusation: "I have made a doleful mistake. Madeline, I love you still, must always love you, but it is as a brother. My eyes are open to this truth, but yours shall never be."

It was now the beginning of April, but the spring was procrastinating, and the final meet of the season took place a few days after Captain

Northcote had come to the honourable conclusion of leaving Maxwell Hall. On the morning that the hounds assembled on the lawn before her uncle's house, where the meet was to take place, Miss Maxwell, radiant with happiness, in view of a long day spent in the society of him who possessed her heart, entered the breakfast-room fully equipped for the day's sport. Smilingly she looked round in search of her companion.

With much perturbation expressed on his countenance, Sir James observed, as he hastily kissed her:

"My dear niece, I am compelled to be your chaperon to-day, I grieve to say; that is, if you still desire to hunt."

"Is Captain Northcote ill, uncle?"

"Not that I know of. But he left for London at cock-crow this morning, on urgent business. What that business is remains a secret."

Miss Maxwell, without making immediate remark, sat down, poured out her uncle's coffee and made a pretence of eating her own breakfast. Then, rising, she left the room, quietly observing:

"I will not put you to the trouble of accompanying me to-day. I awoke with a headache and shall be glad of a rest."

The General gave a prolonged whistle. The only thing that had consoled him for his nephew's sudden flight was the prospect it gave him of a good run with the hounds, the pleasure of which, to serve his own ends, he had so long deprived himself.

Miss Maxwell's disappointment and humiliation at Captain Northcote's unceremonious departure were overpowering. She had made no disguise of her feelings of attachment for him and loved him all the more from believing that it was her wealth alone that prevented this timid lover declaring himself.

No letter coming in explanation of his conduct, further residence at Maxwell Hall became distasteful to her. Her spirits flagged and she begged her uncle's leave to return home, sedately hinting that she hated society and intended to retire from a deceitful world and enter a sisterhood.

Dismayed at this wholly unexpected result of his plot, Sir James hurried to London. That very morning he had heard of Mrs. Rashleigh's return there, the six months of her younger lover's probation being concluded, and he trembled for the possible destruction of his happiness. However desperately his nephew might be in love with Violet it was evident that he had fled further temptation, and intended to remain faithful to Mrs. Rashleigh.

Fired to immediate action by a conviction so unfavourable to his own desires, he hastened to her house with youthful ardour to play his trump card. If he could only see her before Captain Northcote, he felt assured of victory, but a victory that would, unlike most victories, ensure the welfare of all the parties therein concerned.

Assurance on Sir James's part would have been doubly sure could

he have seen the state of despair into which Captain Northcote was plunged. Though some days had elapsed since Mrs. Rashleigh had returned, courage had failed him to go and see her and so seal his fate. He was shamed by a sense of his own faithlessness. That she could prove faithless to him never dawned upon a man who had a most exalted opinion of his own merits and attractions.

When Sir James was admitted into Mrs. Rashleigh's presence, he found her alone and reclining, contrary to her usual habits, languidly on a sofa. As he approached, she only half rose as she extended her hand towards him. He was startled and grieved by the great alteration in her appearance, and exclaimed,

"You have been ill and never told me, Madeline. This was not kind."

"Yes," she murmured. "I am the wreck of my former self. It will be a sore trial to him. Do you think he will bear the test?" she asked eagerly. "My hair, you see, is quite grey."

"If he cannot he is not worthy of your love. But has he not yet been here?"

"No, he has, he assures me, been detained by business; I expect him to-day without fail, but later on."

"Then, as this laggard lover is not likely to disturb us, I may claim your attention for a short space."

Without waiting for an answer, he flung himself on the sofa by her side and took her hand in his. Her heart was throbbing wildly as she looked up at him with a soft smile. He at least was not moved to coldness by the change in her appearance. Gazing with the deepest tenderness upon her he said:

"Yes, you are altered, my loved Madeline. I can see you have been much troubled in mind. But it was your fair soul, your pure heart, I have so long worshipped, and not the shrine enclosing these priceless jewels. These are heavenly gifts that neither age nor time can mar or efface. Madeline, if he proves faithless, will you promise to be mine?"

"You do not then mind my whitening hair, my loss of good looks?"

"I consider these words as favourable to my request. I remain perfectly satisfied, and thus ratify the compact between us." He placed the hand he still held to his lips, then gently releasing it, said: "Now will you allow me to consult you about that scapegrace nephew of mine?" She started. "And over whom you used to have a most beneficial influence. For he has landed both himself and me in a confounded mess."

"How so?"

"All this hunting season he has been making the most violent love to my niece Violet Maxwell. It would be a very advantageous match for him, for she is an heiress, and she, poor child, loves him."

"And what is there to prevent so desirable a marriage taking



place?" inquired Mrs. Rashleigh, with a low laugh of irrepressible merriment.

"That is exactly what I now ask you to find out. No one can doubt for a moment that he is in love with Violet. Yet suddenly he leaves my house and her without one word of explanation or apology. And now Violet vows to enter a sisterhood and remain unwedded all her life."

"I can promise you she will do nothing of the kind. Ah, dear friend, I cannot tell you what joy your confidence has given me. For—it is your nephew's wife I had promised to be, and now by his own act I am free—free!"

"To be mine!" exclaimed Sir James, with genuine enthusiasm and well-acted surprise.

"For ever, if you care for so poor a prize—for you and you only have I ever really loved. My feelings for Captain Northcote are, I have long realised, of a very different nature."

In another instant she was clasped in Sir James's arms, who murmured as her head reposed on his shoulder:

"I have won my last and hardest-fought battle, and the prize is far, far beyond my deserts."

So absorbed were Mrs. Rashleigh and the General in the present blissful moment, that both were equally unobservant, that as he uttered his last words, the door opened and Captain Northcote entered the room, as had been his habit often previously, unannounced. Completely taken aback at the tender sight that met his eyes on entering, he remained on the threshold, stupidly staring at the happy pair.

It is a very different affair for a man to come primed, after a desperate self-struggle, with the confession of his own faithlessness to an original object of adoration, to finding himself forestalled by her inconstancy. Recovering from his overpowering surprise, he gave so loud and emphatic a cough that the two, hitherto entirely absorbed in each other, started quickly asunder and simultaneously turned towards the door.

"Ah, how changed she is!" exclaimed Captain Northcote, *sotto voce*, with savage pleasure, as he reflected, though not without pique, at Mrs. Rashleigh having taken the initiative on his recovered liberty. Drawing himself up haughtily, he observed with dry majesty:

"I think I am one too many on this scene."

"By no means, my dear boy," exclaimed the General, coming forward and clapping him on the back. "You appear on the boards in the nick of time for the *dénouement* of the play. Madeline has explained to my perfect satisfaction the meaning of your hasty departure from my house. All that now remains for you to do is to fly to Violet, who is in town, crave her forgiveness, and thus prevent her from entering a sisterhood, which she has vowed to do, having

she says, proved the hollowness of this world, and of the male sex especially."

"Violet going into a convent!"

"Not when she has received the full confession of your love," said Mrs. Rashleigh, as she approached Captain Northcote, with extended hands. He took them in rather a shamefaced manner, as she continued: "Dear Philip, neither you nor I have proved faithless to each other. We simply made a great mistake and fortunately made this discovery ere it was too late. In consequence we owe our future happiness to each other, and must therefore ever remain friends."

"Dear Mrs. Rashleigh, I must always love you," replied Captain Northcote with genuine fervour, as he touched her hands with a respectful kiss.

"As an aunt," she rejoined slyly.

"Exactly," put in Sir James. "And now be off, young man, and make your peace with Violet. And both of you come and dine with me this evening at the Savoy."

When a few hours later the now happy quartette met at an excellent dinner given by the General, to the astonishment of Captain Northcote and the delight of his uncle, Mrs. Rashleigh's hair had recovered its pristine auburn hue—for with the assistance of the hairdresser she had temporarily whitened it to prove the fidelity of both her admirers—and she looked almost as young as Violet Maxwell. Happiness is the most effectual of rejuvenators.

The winter following his marriage, Sir James hunted six days out of the seven. The wound in his leg, strange to say, never re-opened.



## BY MISTAKE.

FROM SULLY PRUDHOMME.

ABSENT in mind, I called her "dear,"  
Not by design;  
And if she feigned she did not hear,  
She might divine.

With woman it is not the sigh  
Of tender art,  
The pleading word, the ardent eye,  
That melt her heart.

It is the note that comes unsought—  
Trip that betrays—  
By which her subtle soul is taught  
True lover's ways.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## IN THE NIGHT-WATCHES.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN LOTUS LAND,"  
"THE ROMANCE OF SPAIN," ETC., ETC.



AT THE EAST END.

IT was impossible to regret the missionary's inability to take us round, as he expressed it, since but for that we should not have made the acquaintance of Jim Dixon, or gone down the river in the *Angelina* during the Night-Watches.

Having watched the curious cavalcade dash down the high road with all the sensation of a coach and four, until fairly out of sight, Mr. G.'s last words came back to us. "If you like to return to the Home, you will find the teapot in the basket; still hot, but not stewing—the leaves all taken out. No liver-affecting, nerve-destroying tannin for me, if I can help it. The attendant will wait upon you—a cheerful Celestial with a limited amount of English. He looks about twenty-one, but is thirty-three, and has a disconsolate wife out in China, whom he intends to rejoin in two years' time. A cup of tea may send you on your way rejoicing."

We did not act upon the suggestion, but after a short ramble in the labyrinths of the East end, departed, leaving further investigation to a future day and a safe escort. That day did not tarry; and once more we found ourselves eastward bound.

It was an earlier hour than the one appointed. Upon the principle of killing two birds with one stone, we determined, on our road, to call on Jim Dixon's mother, and, if possible, pay the belated wedding visit to Mr. and Mrs. John Pendragon, of Falmouth recollection. This, indeed, would be going "one better" than the proverb.

Mrs. Dixon came first on the list and first on the way. The street

was easily found, about ten minutes' walk from Stepney \* Station. Again we saw, not very far off, flames and torches and outlines of vessels, and black demons running to and fro.

The street in which Mrs. Dixon hid her faded gentility was quiet and retired, and for that part of the world, respectable. Even in the faint light thrown by the gaslamps one could see the house was well kept. The curtains were clean. Every window sill (there were only three in the front) was adorned with a well-fitted wooden box containing evergreens on which care was bestowed. The blinds were down, and on the blind of the parlour window, a shadow was thrown: unmistakably the shadow of Jim himself. It seemed equally certain that he was engaged in comfortably discussing a high tea.

We knocked at the door. The shadow on the blind pricked up its ears, hesitated a moment, then disappeared. As the house was not a mansion, in another moment Jim had opened wide the door. The passage was just broad enough to hold him. As soon as he recognised his visitor his face beamed a distinct welcome; eyes and mouth smiled in concert.

"Eh, but I didn't expect you to keep your word so soon, sir. Come in. I'm having tea, but you won't mind. Right glad the old lady will be to see you. She doesn't have many visitors nowadays."

Then leading the way down the few feet of passage, he threw open the door of the little sitting-room.

"Mother," he cried, "it's Mr. —, the gentleman that went round in the *Angelina* the other night. This reminds me, sir, that I don't even know your name," he laughed. "You never told me, and I never asked."

The omission was soon rectified. As Jim Dixon made the announcement a little, pale, faded woman rose out of a small, straight-backed easy chair. What struck one at once was her quietness; quiet movements, quiet voice, quiet expression: quiet and subdued to sadness. In a moment one saw that the skeleton in the cupboard, which comes to all in greater or lesser degree, had been too much for her. There were the signs of some great blow in life, outlived, but which had left its traces for ever. One hand held some fancy-work; the other which she held out to us was small and delicate, with no trace of rough, household work about it.

"It's very good of you to come and see us, sir," she said in sad, subdued tones. "James has often talked about you. And yet he is not very impressionable, as a rule."

"No wonder," laughed Mr. Jim, colouring; "you were my first passenger, you know, sir. Never before have I escorted any one round to Blackwall in the dead of night. How did you get on with Mr. Hurst the pilot?"

\* In our previous paper, *Shadwell*, by a slip of the pen, was throughout written for *Stepney*.

"As well as ever," we replied. "He is quite an old friend, and has taken us down Channel more than once."

"A very good sort," returned Jim; "though like all pilots I ever came across, he has his opinions and won't bear contradiction."

"A failing not altogether confined to pilots," we remarked.



EASTWARD.

"You may well say that, sir," said Mrs. Dixon, with a sad smile. "It is common not to pilots only but to all men. They are a strong-headed race, for the most part; and less intuitive than women, make more mistakes. Jim has informed me how he told you of our one fatal trouble. Never was a man more anxious to do right than

my husband; never one weaker and more easily led. Not his the fate to have strong opinions and hold to them. He was unsuspecting as the day is long; could not tell good men from bad; held the fatal creed: 'Believe all men honest until you find them the contrary'—as though that would not be all too late for practical purposes. The usual result followed. We lived in Liverpool in those days. He held a first-rate situation, and we had a good home with every comfort about us. I had offended my people by marrying a little beneath me; for, humbly situated as you see me now, I was a lady born. My father was a Doctor of Divinity, Rector of an important parish, and first cousin to the Scotch Earl of B. in whose house, as a child, I regularly spent four months out of every twelve. My husband was a gentleman in every essential, but more humbly born than I. He was handsome and amiable, and apparently possessed every virtue. I was too young then to know anything about weakness of character and men who are easily beguiled. We first met at the house of a mutual friend, and I think on both sides it was love at first sight. My father died suddenly—my mother had long been dead. Against the advice of all friends I married. If ever marriage was made in heaven, I believe this one was. In spite of all the unhappiness it has brought me, in spite of my present position, I would do it over again if it came before me. Of the crime for which my husband suffered, he was legally, not morally guilty. Others—natures he was no more fitted to cope with and no more understood than the child unborn—urged him on to evil. He fell; they profited; his the punishment. All my friends had turned their backs upon me at my marriage; and in the day of my adversity not one stood by me. Not one came to the rally. Human nature can be very bitter and hard and unsympathising; I found it out in my hour of trial. How will it all be, I often wonder, in the great Day of Account? He paid the penalty, and then we came here to hide our shame and sorrow. If no one had stood by me at my marriage, no one was likely to do so now. Through an old friend he obtained an appointment as a clerk in the docks, which kept the wolf from the door; and here has been my home ever since. Here no doubt it will be until I die. If years are measured by suffering, mine has been a long life indeed, though I am not yet fifty years old. In all but days, I am twice fifty."

"Come, mother," cried Jim Dixon, "don't get too much into the blues. There are a few blessings left you. Think of your worthy son, for instance."

"My boy," returned the mother, taking his words more seriously than he meant them, "you are indeed the joy and consolation of my life, but for whom I should not be here now. Yet I cannot help feeling and bitterly regretting that you were born to better things and will never attain to them. It seems almost a reproach to me."

"I am perfectly happy," returned Jim, "and what more need be?"



What more can a man want in this 'vale of misery'? As long as you are there, and I can pay my way and keep out of debt, I ask nothing more of life."

The mother sighed. "I shall not always be here," she murmured; "and I dread your marrying some low woman who will make you wretched. What chance have you of marrying any other?"

"I don't mean to marry as long as you're there," declared Jim, "and you're good for another twenty years. No fear of my marrying after that. I shall be an old bachelor," he laughed. "My barque will be my bride—and a very good one too. No quarrels—peace and goodwill on both sides. She'll be like my dog—however much I scold her, will never answer back again."

All this time he had been sitting at the table in front of what looked like a substantial home-made meat pie. He had already had one helping and was evidently ready for another.

"I suppose, sir, it would be a mere compliment to ask you to take some?" he said with a great deal of diffidence.

"With great pleasure," we replied, "if the appetite were equal to the occasion; but it is not. Nothing, however, would be more acceptable than a cup of tea, if you will give it us," turning to the mother. "That excellent pie must be of your making, Mrs. Dixon."

"It is," she replied, smiling. "Everything Jim eats goes through my hands. I can cook, if I can do nothing else; and for the rough work of the house a woman comes in twice a week. It is the one luxury I allow myself, out of my own little income of forty pounds a year; that and good tea. And we owe no man anything: so—like the Man of Ross—we are passing rich."

She handed a cup of tea as she spoke: the cup itself of real old Worcester china which she had brought out of a little cupboard behind her. "A remnant of the days gone by," she said. "They belonged to my great-grandmother. I have five left."

This woman was far above anything we had expected to find in Jim's mother. He had said his parents were "a sort of gentlefolk": but here was a gentlewoman to the backbone; and twelve years of East end life, the slur of a convict's wife upon her, her son a lighter-man, not a single element of refinement coming to her from the outside world: all these adverse forces had not been able to deprive her of her refinement, or rob her of her quiet dignity. She was still as able to fill her proper rank in life as she had been at the time of her unfortunate marriage.

The simple tea-tray was in front of her. She returned to her chair, and went on with her fancy-work whilst she talked.

"May we ask what you are doing, Mrs. Dixon?"

"It is Irish crochet," she returned. "If I may call that Irish," she added smiling, "that never was done by Irishwoman and never was in Ireland. The work was taught me by a young woman who had been brought up in a convent by the Irish nuns. It is a collar,

and I sell them as fast as I make them. I don't know why, but there seems to be always a demand for them amongst elderly ladies of the old school. I sell them to a West end shop, and often make as much as fifteen shillings a week. Ah! I see what you are thinking; that by hook or by crook I might have done better for my boy. No; it was taken out of my hands. When my husband was living his failing health required delicacies beyond our means. Jim is better educated than he appears, but I have been his sole instructor. It was all I could do for him."

"A very good all, too," returned Jim. "If I were Prime Minister I shouldn't be half as happy. It's only on the very coldest nights of the year that I feel my work a bit hard. Then it does occur to me that I might have been a baker and slept near the oven door."

Time was nearly up. A little more conversation, a little more wonder at the way this admirable woman bore her trials and kept her refinement, and we bade her farewell, with a promise to come again. She stood on her hearthrug, dressed in a simple black gown that was worn as only a gentlewoman could wear it. On her head was something that looked like lace and fell in soft folds; probably her own handiwork. Her face was pale and refined, her hair grey; in her youth she must have been very pretty—she was far more than that now. Jim's well-carved features and fine expression were no longer a mystery, but by the side of his frail mother, he looked strong, stalwart, hardy, almost weather-beaten. We told him that we had another visit to pay in his neighbourhood: a wedding visit sixteen years old: and asked him if he knew the street and the name.

"Right well," he replied, "and John Pendragon too, though I never went to his house. It's about twenty minutes' walk from here, and if you will allow me to accompany you, the walk will digest my tea for me."

The offer was accepted, and by a maze of intricate windings the desired thoroughfare was reached.

"I am very grateful to you for coming to see mother," he said as we stood at parting. "You don't know the good it will do her. The only gentleman she ever has to talk to now is the parson. The tables will be turned," he laughed: "she will talk of you to me, not I to her. I suppose, sir, you haven't a mind to come on the river to-night? It isn't a summer's night, and we haven't summer breezes; but it isn't cold, either, and we have the stars overhead. I go off at one o'clock, and the *Angelina* will be proud to have you on board."

"Well, Jim," we returned, "your offer is tempting; very seldom can we resist the river by night or day; but it means a night out of bed, and we have much to do this evening in other ways. If, however, it should be possible, when and where are you to be found?"

"At the house would be best," returned Jim; "and midnight or

half an hour after. The mother will be gone to bed, but I shall be in the parlour."

So it was left an open question.

John Pendragon's house was quickly found, and John Pendragon, as fortune would have it, was at home and opened the door to



EASTWARD.

us himself. His astonishment on beholding his visitor was unbounded.

"No, it cannot be! Yes, it is! Come in, sir, come in! Kitty," raising his voice, "here be a gentleman come to pay thee a wedding visit. Sure, sir, we shall think it a second honeymoon! Many a long year ago since our honeymoon went down, sir, but thank heaven we're as agreed together now as we was then. Never had one

word o' difference together. I always says if we'd ha' lived in Essex we should ha' had the flitch of bacon over and over again."

Here we found ourselves in a very different atmosphere from Mrs. Dixon's quiet parlour; more robust, less refined; full of strong life, bustle and activity. The day's work was over; they were enjoying a rest before supper. A churchwarden stood upright in the corner of the fender, and a strong smell of tobacco betrayed that we had disturbed John Pendragon in his evening pipe, truly the pipe of peace. His wife was a small, comely, wiry woman, with a bright, rosy-cheeked face "sunning over with smiles," and keen dark eyes. Care had touched her lightly. She was forty years old and looked thirty. Transplanting from the pure, soft Cornish air to the fogs and dense atmosphere of London had done her no harm. It was evident in the twinkling of an eye that her husband worshipped the ground she trod upon: equally evident that she had the better head-piece of the two, the keener mind. John's marriage had been a good day's work for him; he had put into the lottery and drawn a prize. Probably much of his present humble prosperity was due to his helpmeet.

"I'm proud to see you, sir," said Mrs. Pendragon, dropping an old-fashioned country curtsy as she held out her hand. "Anyone who knew Falmouth in the old days, and our dear Rector, Mr. Wright, and Miss Anna Maria Fox, and visited at Penjerrick, knows the way straight to my heart. Indeed they do. John, here, told me about meeting you, sir, that night, when he went off to Liverpool Street with Angelina and the Chinamen. They caught their train, too, poor, helpless creatures."

"Being a Cornish pony, Angelina could not have done otherwise," we remarked.

Mrs. Pendragon beamed as she answered:

"I always do say, sir, the best things come from Cornwall, whether it's Cornish cream, or whether it's ponies, or whether it's people. We be quite a race apart, you know, sir, and properly understood and properly taken in hand, it's hard to beat us."

"And so, Mrs. Pendragon, you lived with Miss Anna Maria Fox, and knew our dear old friend Mr. Wright, the Rector."

"Ay, indeed, sir, I did. And good days they were. Never was a better or kinder mistress than Miss Anna Maria. She made every one happy about her; and it was all done so quietly, we only realised the blessing of living with her when we left her. And as for Mr. Rector,\* though he was not a Cornish man, there never was a Rector

\* Here Mrs. Pendragon fell into the Falmouth custom. In those days, and for many previous generations, the Rector of Falmouth sank his name, and was addressed on all occasions as "Rector," or "Mr. Rector." He possessed special privileges, conferred by Act of Parliament in the reign of Charles II. These privileges a certain disaffected portion of the inhabitants endeavoured to annul, and entering an action, forced the Rector to fight them from one court of appeal to another: the final verdict

like him before, and never will be again. Never was any one so large-hearted and beloved. I mind me when he first came to Falmouth: I was a slip of a girl at the time; the congregation at the Parish Church was not half a dozen people. Sometimes before they could read Morning Prayers they had to send out to pick up somebody to make a third. Before Mr. Wright had been there a month, sir, the church was crowded to the very aisles, many people standing the whole service through. His sermons were the talk of the town and for many a mile round; and it was easy to see by his gracious manners and his fine air that he had been brought up, so to say, at Court."

"And yet, Mrs. Pendragon, neither Miss Anna Maria's good home nor the Rector's influence could keep you from forsaking both when John appeared on the scene."

"Ah, sir," returned Mrs. Pendragon blushing as though John's conquest had been a matter of yesterday: "there is a power stronger than the best Rector's influence, or the best mistress's good deeds, and that's Love. I told John I was giving up much for him, but I'm glad to say he's never given me cause to regret it. I think we're as happy and well-to-do as here and there one."

"Hear, hear!" cried John in stentorian voice, his face absolutely cracking with smiles; "well said, Kitty woman. I do say, sir, as a good wife makes a good husband."

An assertion perhaps not strictly borne out by experience. But it was John Pendragon's modest way of putting it, and it was his firm conviction. He did not realise his own excellence, like all good men and true, who, constantly aiming at the sky, never reach their mark.

"I remember your coming to Falmouth, sir, by a special circumstance," continued Mrs. Pendragon; "it was a flying visit you were paying in one of her Majesty's brigs. Lieutenant Bromley was in command—another great friend of yours, sir, but more your own age than the good old Rector. I remember the name so well, because my sister was once housemaid to my Lady Bromley, his mother—and a dear and charming lady she was, sir, was her ladyship. Well, sir, you and Lieutenant Bromley were out driving with Mr. Rector. John was driving his master—not this John, but the other John, his own coachman. Overlooking the harbour, John turns to his master from the box, and touching his cap, says: 'If you please,

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confirming every previous verdict, and giving it triumphantly in his favour. They have, however, now been privately commuted, rendering the living much less valuable than of old, and it is possible that the ancient custom of addressing the possessor of the living as "Mr. Rector" has gone with the commutation. One of the titles borne by the Rector of Falmouth was "Lord of the Black Rock," a barren honour of later years, but once subjecting every vessel that entered the harbour to a substantial toll that enriched the Rector's exchequer.

Mr. Rector,' says he, 'that there vessel down there is one of her Majesty's brigs.' 'Yes, John,' says the Rector, 'and at the present moment you have the honour of driving her Majesty's Commander of the brig. Be extra careful of your horses, John.' Sir, I met John that same afternoon, and 'There, Kitty,' says he, 'I felt that limp in the arms, and that weak in the knees, that if my horses had run away that moment I could never ha' found strength to stop 'em.'"

Impossible not to laugh at Mrs. Pendragon's reminiscence. Well we remembered the incident. The halcyon days in the brig; the constant, delightful changes by day; the rubber at night, when Innisfail would fall asleep and revoke, and trump his partner's best card and otherwise invent new rules never dreamed of by Cavendish. That time in Falmouth Harbour was perhaps the crowning point of all: and the day spent with the Rector with all his unbounded hospitality, his glow of welcome, his never-ending stream of rich and sparkling eloquence, a day in our lives to be long remembered. We gave a sigh to the past.

"And poor Miss Anna Maria Fox," we said, coming back to the present by a strong effort: "we fear she is failing."

"Ay, sir, by all accounts she has not long to live," replied Mrs. Pendragon. "She has entered upon her last days, but has nothing to dread. She was a saintly woman, sir, and has lived a saintly life. A great age she is now, and death will be her gain. There will be the rejoining those who have gone before; all the best of her kith and kin; and returning to eternal youth. I do think the best of us might envy her."

"But now, Mrs. Pendragon, let us talk of those who are beginning life. What about your children? Where are they all, and how many have you?"

"I have five," returned Mrs. Pendragon; "three boys and two girls. Of course I think them all cherubs, saving when they have a fit of the romps and make too much noise. The three younger ones are in bed: the two eldest, Johnny and Milly, are spending the evening at a neighbour's—a little party in our humble way, sir. Johnny's fourteen, Milly's thirteen. Good children, but you wouldn't always find the house as peaceful as this. Fond as I am of them, I do enjoy our quiet time together after they be all in bed and asleep."

Here a little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour and warned us that we had no more time to give to the wedding visit.

"Well, Mrs. Pendragon," we said, getting up to depart, "we have been sixteen years paying you this first call; we must not be another sixteen before we pay you another."

"No, indeed, sir! We might be all dead and buried," was the cheerful response. "'Be the day short or be the day long, the time goes on to evensong.' I don't think that's quite the right way to put it, but it's what comes to us all. The dear Rector's Evensong rang



out in '92, though he had given up Falmouth before that, and now it will soon ring out for Miss Anna Maria. She thought a deal of the Rector, did Miss Anna Maria, though she was a Quaker lady, and had been brought up in Quaker ways. They're dying out now, sir, along with many other good old institutions."

We left them with hearty good wishes for present and future, and turned away to continue our evening expedition. It was some



GOING INTO DOCK.

distance off, and as good luck would have it, an empty hansom came up on its way back to town. This in a very short time brought us to the desired haven.

In the distance we caught sight of Joe Turner at his stall, pursuing his occupation, and went up to him. He saw us when we were yet some yards off, and touched his cap with quite a pleased look: so much will the smallest token of sympathy find its way to the human

heart and do its work. We had said very little to him that previous night, but that little had not been forgotten.

"Glad to see you again, sir," said Joe. "Didn't think you'd be in these parts again so soon. You ain't coming to live here, be you, sir?" eyeing us curiously. "You bain't a parson, be you?"

"No, Joe; nothing half so good: and it may be long before we are here again. But we're glad to see you hard at work."

"You'll do that, sir, come when you will. I'm in desperate earnest. Other men have got on from nothing, so will I. I'm eighteen now. I mean to stick here till I'm twenty-five. Then I reckon I shall have saved enough to begin in a bigger way."

"Be careful, Joe. In making a change, be sure you don't kill the goose that laid the golden egg."

Joe looked wise: he was very wise for a lad of eighteen.

"I know what you mean, sir," said he. "I sha'n't be in a hurry. It wouldn't do to buy a pig in a poke. Never will I make a change until I'm certain sure it's for the better. The parson comes along one day, and, 'Joe Turner,' says he, 'mind what you're about when you give up this thriving concern. Don't throw away dirty water before you can get clean.' 'Well, sir,' says I, 'I never had nothing to do with dirty water yet, and I don't mean as I ever shall. Clean water for me, sir, whether it's a teacupful, bucketful, or riverful.' I knew what he meant fast enough; but he was just a little bit too patronising; treated me like a boy; hadn't taken my proper measure. But he was a good sort of man, and I liked him all the same. Only he never again said nothing about dirty water. Now, sir, wouldn't you let me give you a dozen o' these oysters, free of charge? They're prime; every bit as good as natives. They are indeed."

It was impossible to help smiling, and not like and admire the lad for his awkward hospitality.

"Thank you, Joe, just as much as if your good offer had been accepted. We have no time for oysters to-night. And if you give away your profits in this wholesale way, you will have to add another five years to your twenty-five before embarking on a larger scale."

"Well," returned Joe, "it's not often I offers any one a dozen oysters free, gratis, for nothing, but it's the very first time as ever the offer was refused. I'm afraid, sir," with another direct look, "you're too much of a gentleman to eat oysters off a street barrow. I must ask you again when I'm twenty-five and doing bigger and better: standing behind a counter with a roof over my head, maybe. But I offered 'em once to parson, as a sort of make-up for being a little bit sharp over the dirty water. 'And,' says he, 'Joe, I never refuse a good offer,' and he took 'em and ate 'em, vinegar and pepper and all—every one of 'em. 'And, Joe,' says he, 'they're downright stunning.' Them was his very words. He was only a curate, sir, and I think a poor one into the bargain; a pale face and a bag of bones he carried about with him; and says I to myself, 'I

wonder if he's had any dinner to-day, or any supper. It don't half look like it."

"Where is he now, Joe?"

"Well, sir"—and here tears came into the lad's eyes: we looked keenly at him and were not mistaken—"they tell me he's dying of consumption; spent his little in feeding others. And if ever I feel thankful it's that I gave him that dozen of oysters, and if ever I feel sorry, it's that I cheeked him over the dirty water. You see, sir, it was well meant on his part. Half the fellows do chuck away their dirty water before they can get clean, but that's because they're born fools. I haven't no pity for them; not so much as would go into an oyster shell."

A customer came up and we left Joe to his work, and went on to the Home. Mr. G. was patiently waiting, the inevitable teapot before him in its Chinese receptacle. To-night he was alone: there were no grown up children to ship off to celestial regions.

"You are later than your time," he said, after the first greeting, "but the later the better. It is in the Night Watches that there is most to be seen in these opium dens. As for me, to-night my time is my own. I have arranged not to return home if I am too late for the last train."

An enormous Chinese lantern was lighted up in the next room: a sort of puppet show, where a procession went round and round, composed of lions and tigers and men on horseback in perpetual chase, and fair ladies walking in bridal procession under glittering canopies: all worked by a curious contrivance moved by the rarefied air above the lighted candles.

"A gigantic toy that amuses the children," said Mr. G. "Amuses grown-up children too amongst the Chinese and Japanese."

He passed on to another room, where he kept his library; showed us the Bible translated into Chinese, and the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' most popular of all secular books, he said—and who could wonder? Then we went out into the night: into the garish thoroughfares, from which we presently turned into the Egyptian darkness of Paradise Row.

We came to the shop we had before entered. The intelligent Chinaman might have been weighing opium ever since—was weighing it now. Eager faces and glittering eyes looked on at the process. The shop was crowded.

"Hardly worth while going in," said our guide. "We should only see a repetition of the other night, and have other places to visit. Let us push on."

Through the darkness we went, passing, perhaps, some two dozen houses, when an outside sign and an internal glimmer betrayed another opium den. This was on a slightly larger scale than the last. Probably no stranger unaccompanied by the missionary would have been admitted. As it was we passed in unchallenged excepting by one sharp look: our guide explaining in a few Chinese words that we

had no evil intentions. The room beyond was full of smokers, some using ordinary tobacco, others opium, reclining on couches, holding their pipes, heating the drug over the flame of the small lamp, going through the usual performance. All greeted Mr. G. and gave us welcome. The atmosphere was up to fever heat and clouds of smoke made everything seen as through a grey fog.

A narrow, steep, ladder-like staircase conducted to the upper rooms, equally crowded, and confined to opium smokers only. In the corner of the room was a sort of shrine, something like a child's puppet show or theatre, and as trivial. Perfumed sticks were smouldering in small jars.

"This they call a joss-house," said Mr. G. "It is part of their superstitious religion. They burn these sticks to the memory of the departed; to propitiate the spirits and cause them good luck. In converting these people—where we do convert them—this element of superstition is the hardest to conquer: the last to die out. One can hardly wonder, seeing that superstition is inherent in human nature. Even we Christians have our superstitious fads. One will not sit down thirteen to table; another banishes peacock's feathers from his house; one will never walk under a ladder, another shudders if he sees the New Year's new moon under a cloud. And yet all the time we know that Providence has the ordering of our lives, that the world is governed by the Divine Will, without which not even a sparrow falls to the ground."

"But why is this joss-house specially placed here?" we asked.

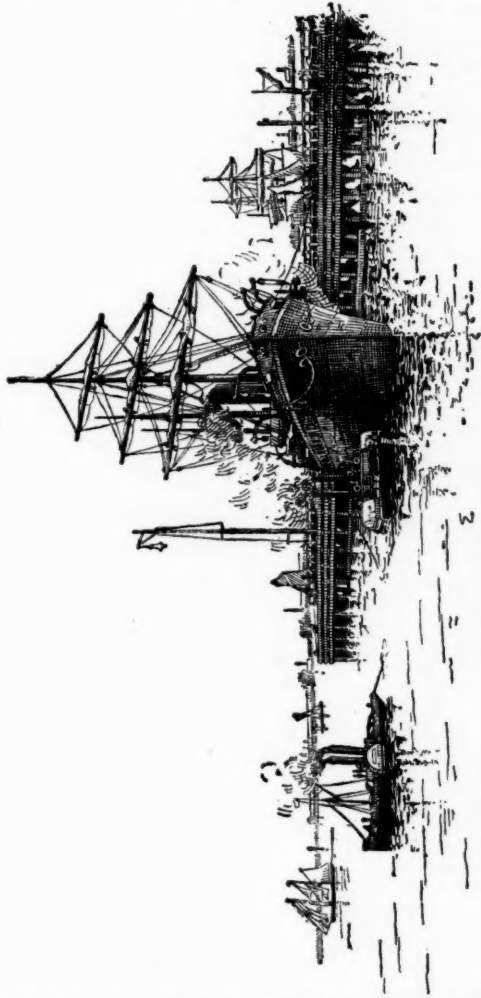
"If you want a reason, look into the next room," said Mr. G. drily. "Look, but be discreet."

The door was open; we entered without difficulty. To our surprise, some fifteen or twenty Celestials stood round a table, with eager attitudes and absorbed expressions. At the head stood the director, with eyes and attention that never flagged. One upward glance at the missionary, one nod, and he went on with his work, all unconcerned. We might almost have been in a room at Monte Carlo. There were curious little cards on the table, and an infinite number of small counters something like buttons, that were swept to and fro with inconceivable rapidity, yet with a distinct system. So rapid were the movements that it seemed there must be every opportunity for unfair play.

"But no," said Mr. G., "I believe that seldom if ever takes place. As far as gambling can be honest, they play honestly: and if a man is found cheating he has a bad time of it. They have many games; sometimes using counters like small dominoes; sometimes round rings. At some of the games no money passes until the end, when each pays or receives according to his luck."

"It is a wonder they admit us so readily," we said; for not one of them paid the least attention to us, nor showed any sign of being put out by a strange face.

"They leave everything to the director," said Mr. G. "What he passes they countenance. Had you come in alone, it is quite possible that you would have experienced some rough usage: a too-speedy exit accompanied by muscular force. With me you are as



ENTERING THE ALBERT DOCKS.

safe here as in your own house. And *this* is the *raison-d'être* of the joss-house. They light the perfumed sticks to propitiate the spirits supposed to be hovering about, and to bring them luck."

"No doubt the arrival of a vessel brings them custom?"

"Indeed it does. And judging by appearances, there must have been a fresh arrival yesterday or to-day. They have touts on the look-out, and the moment a vessel enters these are on the alert; lying in wait and catching their prey. Malays, Chinese, Lascars—all are fish for their net. Few escape them. A Malay or a Chinaman receives every one at the top of the staircase, and demands the password. If the new-comer knows it not, out he goes much faster than he came in. If an intruder comes whom they may have reason to fear, you have no idea how quickly everything is cleared. Every trace of playing disappears as if by magic, the room becomes an ordinary room, and the men quietly smoking their pipes look innocent and inoffensive. And really it is what they are. There is not the least harm in them: they are only their own enemies, losing their own money; and if a stranger enters and is roughly handled, it is not that they bear him ill-will, but that they will not have their pleasures interfered with. They also know that they are not strictly within their legal rights: but if there were no worse gambling-houses than these in London, no great harm would be done; men who ought to be rich would not have to mortgage their estates, and noble ladies need not pawn their jewels."

Playing was going on all this time, and what struck one forcibly was the silence that was never broken. Right and left, up and down, counters were pushed and thrown: eyes seemed to flash in all directions; eager looks followed the game—to us an incomprehensible mystery. All sorts of exchanges took place—there never was an objection raised or a word uttered. Whether our presence kept them absolutely still, or whether this was their ordinary mode of playing, it was hard to tell.

"I think it is generally quiet, as to-night," said the missionary. "They are not quarrelsome and hot-blooded, as a rule, amongst each other, and the races keep apart. Where Hindus go, the Chinese will keep away, and vice versâ. They hate each other thoroughly. In their own words, 'Chinaman down, Black man no help him up; Black man down, Chinaman no help him up.' But the Chinaman and Black will help his fellow to the utmost of his power, sharing his last copper. In this, indeed, they carry out the very golden rule of Christianity of doing to others as they would be done by."

Still the game went on, and was becoming monotonous; whilst the atmosphere must have been only a few degrees below that of the Black Hole of Calcutta.

"It may last for hours," said Mr. G., "and without apparent variation. We have nothing to gain by remaining, except, perhaps, a fainting fit from the heat of the room."

The *croupier* (if he may be allowed the dignity), dismissed us with another nod, scarcely raising his eyes from the table. Throughout, his manner was grave and absorbed: a Prime Minister settling the



affairs of a nation. Not a smile, not a word, impatient or otherwise, had escaped him. He was a big man for his race, and evidently was not to be trifled with.

The next room had thinned whilst we were in the gambling-room. Perfumed sticks were still burning in front of the joss-house, that with its green and pink paper and tinsel, and cabalistic signs representing so many charms, looked like a valentine on a large scale. We were hospitably offered seats. The missionary was evidently not only tolerated amongst them, but liked and esteemed.

"It is because I come amongst them with the gloved hand," he said. "I don't spare their faults; but I don't try to convert them by the terrors of the law; by describing to them the outpouring of the vials, the everlasting flames of torment, fire unquenchable. It is by the agency of love and mercy that you must gain your converts. I believe much more in the still small voice of persuasion than in the thunders of denunciation. Anyway, it is little we can do, and few enough we convert, if we are to judge by visible signs. But I always think of that passage: 'There is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth.'"

One man on a lounge looked a better-dressed, more decent specimen of his race than most of them.

"He is so," said Mr. G., "and but for his inveterate opium smoking would be in a far better position. Is it not so?" he asked, turning to the man, who understood a little English.

"Yes," he answered, looking fondly at his pipe, "but me no happier. Never so happy as when smoking opium. Beautiful dreams—beautiful dreams. Do me no harm. No headache. Good appetite."

"He is exceptionally strong and healthy," said Mr. G., "and seems to escape the ordinary penalties. Look at his pipe. It is old and valuable. He would not give it you for £100."

"Not for £200," said the Celestial, with another affectionate gaze at his black treasure. "Pipe forty year old; smoked by father; beautiful flavour. You take. Me lend you. You smoke one draw. You no woman."

"What does he mean?" we asked.

"He means that it is desecration for a woman to touch one of their pipes. The pipe would for ever lose caste, so to say. Women are lightly esteemed amongst them, as an inferior race of beings. Especially is this the case with Hindus. If a woman is seen to take up and smoke a favourite pipe by the owner, it is as much as her life is worth. There was a case in point some time ago, in a house frequented by Indians. A man went into the room and saw his favourite pipe in the hands of a woman, who was calmly enjoying a draw. After that the deluge! There was a fearful howl of rage. It might have been the end of all things. The woman knowing what to expect, escaped for her life: down one street, up another,

the man in hot pursuit. Then she turned into a cul-de-sac, the enraged pipe-owner after her. Fortunately the master of the house in which this tragedy took place followed in pursuit of the man, just as the man was pursuing the woman—a sort of House-that-Jack-built arrangement. He came up at the moment that the man had raised his knife and was about to plunge it into the offender. Another instant and murder would have been committed. One well-aimed blow and the man lay sprawling, the woman was saved, and the knife was transferred to the rescuer's pocket. A very narrow escape. Pipes smoked by women do not give any opium deposit in the bowl, this deposit being worth its weight in gold when scraped out and added to the fresh preparation. It is no doubt a sort of concentrated essence, which has the greater effect on nerves and brain."

The Celestial had listened attentively to this story. "Hindu right," he said, energetically. "Woman touch pipe, she die. Me do the same. Now, sir, you one draw," offering us the treasure. "This pipe, very best pipe in London. No better in China."

The favour declined—a great favour in his eyes—created astonishment. It was inconceivable that any one could resist the tempting offer.

Time was going on. We were glad to leave this den, and escape into air fresh as Paradise Row produced. Some paces further on and we came to the poorest and humblest of the dens in our experience.

The front was almost in darkness, and on entering the inner room it proved deserted. No visitors had arrived to-night, a not unusual state of things in this particular den. The master lay on the bed or couch, which took up three parts of the room. He was smoking his opium pipe in solitary state, with a somewhat mournful expression. The exhilaration stage had not been reached—perhaps never was reached in his case. His face was quiet and amiable, and not unpleasing; his body small. He was lying in his shirt-sleeves, and seemed glad to see the missionary. His solitude had probably become tedious, in spite of opium. Everything bore the greatest signs of poverty. Compared with this the other dens had been luxurious. The man spoke English; broken English, but fluent enough.

"How is it you are alone?" asked Mr. G. when the first greeting was over, and the man had placed chairs for us and returned to his couch and pipe. "How is it you are alone?"

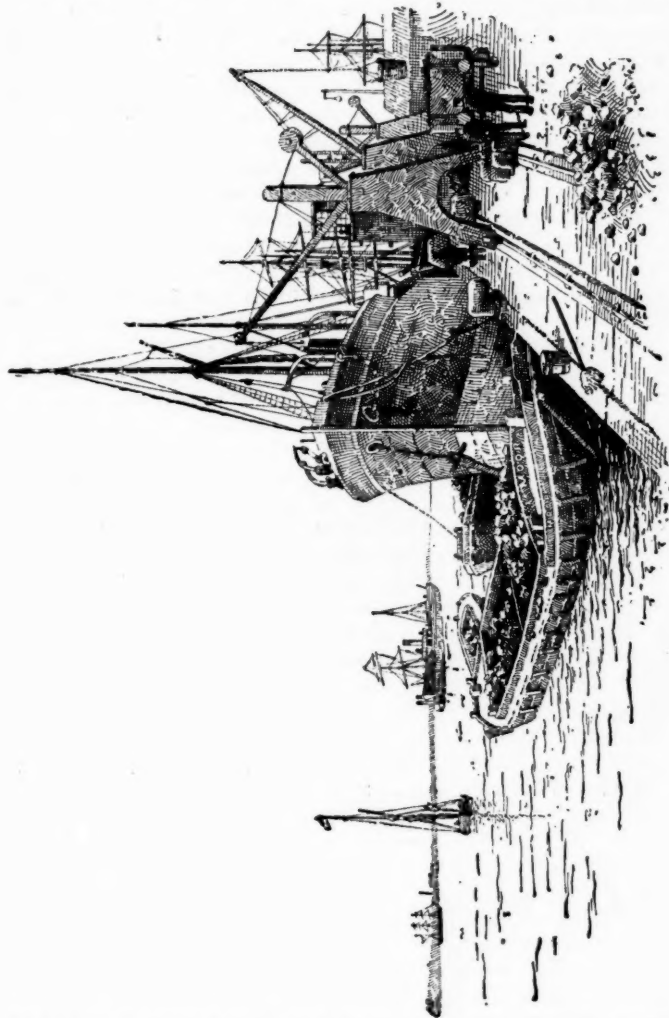
"No one come to-night," replied the man plaintively; "all go elsewhere. Me quite alone. Wife sick upstairs; very sick. Angelina," raising his voice, "Mr. G. come to see you."

*Angelina* again! We hardly believed our ears. Undoubtedly the name was to haunt us for ever. And such a name for such a den! "Is that really her name?" we asked the missionary.

"Really and truly," he answered, "and her history is a curious and romantic one—in its way. She is a remarkable woman in her way, has

Italian blood in her veins, and is said to be related to a famous writer who died recently. I wish she would come down and show herself."

But apparently this was the last thing she had any intention of



COALING IN THE ALBERT DOCKS.

doing. Not a sound was heard above, not a stair creaked; Angelina responded not to the voice of her spouse.

"Me sick too," he said, "but must be here. Both cannot be sick one time upstairs. Me growing old."

"Old?" we returned. "You do not look old."

"How old are you?" said Mr. G.

"How old you think?"—turning to us.

"About forty-five," judging, as we thought, pretty accurately.

"Forty-five!" he laughed. "Me young man, then! Me seventy. Time soon come to die."

It seemed impossible. There was not a trace of grey hairs about him, as far as one could see in the dim, uncertain light. His face was unwrinkled, his eyes had a certain mild fire about them. Certainly his skin was dark and tight-drawn, and he had not an ounce of superfluous flesh about him, and probably never had had.

"Can he be telling the truth?" we asked the missionary.

"I think so," he replied. "He is more likely to understate than overstate his age. You see, he has not dug his grave with his teeth, as the saying runs, for he has not had too much in the way of food."

"No; never much to eat," said the man, who listened attentively and took in all that was said. "When young man, me work hard; much kicks, small food. Now, no work hard, but no food. No opium, me die straight. Opium no do harm; do good. Me smoke fifty years; no kill me."

He looked at his pipe affectionately, which had gone out whilst he talked.

"Like those who smoke tobacco, he would rather starve than go without his pipe," said the missionary. "It takes the place of food with them, and it is cheaper than tobacco. They smoke overnight, and in the morning wake with a craving for more opium, but not for food. How he lives and makes both ends meet is a mystery. He is poor to the last degree, yet always cheerful and contented. There opium has the advantage over alcohol. It exhilarates; banishes ill-temper and moroseness; makes them light-hearted; the gait elastic and joyous; the most commonplace surroundings are idealised; everything seemed *couleur de rose*. Until, by-and-by, it may be years first, the penalty begins; Nemesis steps in; the end is deplorable. In this case it has not done much harm, but he has always been a moderate smoker; and evidently, small and wiry as he is, has had a very tough constitution. You may, however, take it from me that opium smoking cannot be indulged in moderation. Like drink, like every vice that appeals to the senses, it grows and grows until it becomes the master. There are exceptions—the exception proves the rule—but this is the usual result in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred. It is a fatal habit, producing different effects in different people. In some an abnormal memory for past events; in others blotting out the past, all sense of responsibility, of possessing a life and influence for which account must be given. The present moment is everything and passes in a sort of never-ending day-dream. It all indicates an unhealthy condition of the

brain, for which a terrible day of reckoning has to be met—if not in this world, then in the next."

At this moment a slight creaking of the stairs was heard; they had been squeezed into one corner of the room and must have ascended spirally. Curiosity had been stronger than the voice of the husband. From the conversation going on, these were evidently not ordinary visitors. Possibly feminine suspicion was aroused; danger might threaten.

"Angelina come," said her spouse, "but she very bad. You think she die?" to the missionary.

"Why, no," replied Mr. G. "It is only headache, probably; liver out of order; want of fresh air."

The mystery was, not that anyone should die in this terrible atmosphere—truly a den of dens—but that anyone could possibly live out a month of it. We looked towards the aperture—door there was none—and it was slowly filled with the presence of a huge woman who had evidently crawled down the stairs step by step with difficulty. Husband and wife had reversed the right order of things. Her large pale face bore marks of suffering, but looked essentially amiable. Her voice—also suffering—was mild and pleasant. She filled up the whole gap, but nothing would persuade her to advance a step further.

"Angelina, Mr. G. come to see you," said the little man on the couch, looking smaller than ever by comparison with his better half. "Gentleman come with him. Want to see you too. Come down."

But Angelina was not to be persuaded. Seeing Mr. G. she felt all was right, and with a very deliberate: "Good evening. You are welcome. Glad to see you. Hope you are well—Angelina very ill," the huge mountain of suffering amiability slowly reascended the spiral staircase. It is said that only a conjuror can put a quart of wine into a pint measure, but that Angelina should dispose of herself within the limits of that staircase was quite as incomprehensible and miraculous.

"In other dens," said Mr. G. quietly, as we prepared to leave, "I have begged you to give nothing; it was not wanted, and I feel they ought not to be encouraged; but here a trifle would be well bestowed. Half the time I believe both husband and wife have nothing to eat. He has his pipe to console him; but Angelina being an Englishwoman, and a worthy woman in her way, has never smoked opium. "If nature abhors a vacuum," he added with a touch of humour, "great must be her frequent sufferings; for as you see, Angelina is not a shrimp."

We went out into the night, and the air really seemed strong with a Highland freshness and the stars looked wonderfully pure and beautiful after our late experience. It had created an inevitable feeling of sadness and depression, this human misery, and patient suffering, and placid contentment. A more wretched state of things it was impossible to conceive, and yet there was no complaining; the

back was wonderfully fitted to the burden. Most forcibly it brought before one the intense mystery of pain; the strange problem, never to be solved on earth, of the origin of evil.

"We will now visit—and for to-night it shall be our last visit—the Asiatic Rest," said Mr. G. "Hitherto we have visited dens that flourish by sin and self-indulgence: that is their *raison d'être*. The Asiatic Rest exists to counteract this evil as far as possible. Here men of all castes assemble, each having their own department. We shall see a good many Hindus, who are, on the whole, a quieter race than the Celestials, but I don't know that they are better in other ways. Here they are taken in; literature is provided; beds for the night; food if destitute. It is quite a large building, doing much good, chiefly supported by voluntary contributions."

"Do many Hindus come to London?" we asked.

"A great many. Quite eight thousand in every year; sometimes more. They are like cats and seem to attach themselves to places; consequently they seldom change their vessel. Year after year, you see the same vessels and the same faces. Their religion makes them fastidious and peculiar; they don't mix with other races, and you rarely see them in the streets of London. They never frequent places of amusement or anything connected with London life. Their caste forbids them to eat with others; so if you meet one, be sure the kit on his shoulders contains his cooking utensils."

"And they cook their own food, and eat it alone?"

"Always. If they eat with others not of their own caste, they are 'unclean' and have to go through endless ceremonies and no small torture to be purified: shaving the head; unsavoury baths, such as, one would suppose, would do anything *but* purify them. The ordeal over, those who have taken part in purifying their brother, clothe themselves in spotless white—a contrast to their dark skins—and all is ended. Restoration has taken place."

"Will all these superstitious barbarities never yield to civilization?"

"A difficult question to answer," replied the missionary; "but one thing is certain: if they are ever to do so, the end of the world is yet very far off. As to that matter, we know nothing about it."

"Are all these Hindus of the poorest and lowest class?" we asked, passing over a matter beyond the ken of mortal man.

"By no means," replied Mr. G. "Occasionally they are even of a superior grade. But these are they who, for the most part, come over on special missions. More often than not to seek an audience of the Queen, and to ask her Majesty to redress some special and private grievance at home: appealing against judgments in the Indian Courts."

"But of course they do not see the Queen?"

"Never. But it is astonishing how persistent they are. They haunt the palaces, shadowing them for days and weeks with the



patience of a Job. They have been known to follow her Majesty to Windsor and even to Balmoral. I remember a special case in point."

"What was it?" we asked, as he paused.

"It was a Sikh, of great respectability in India. His father took to drinking and went mad. The estate was put in trust for the children, but through legal roguery and mismanagement, everything was wasted and went to the dogs. Unable to obtain redress in his own country, the poor fellow came over to England. If he



OFF WORK.

could only gain audience of the Kaiser-i-Hind, as they call her Majesty, everything would be restored."

"A forlorn hope?" we said, as the missionary paused again.

"You shall hear. He reached the Victoria Docks one bitterly cold day in January. This alone would have been enough to daunt a man not abnormally strung up by the task in hand. Wrapping himself up in his blanket, he sallied forth, his cooking apparatus on his back; a tall, gaunt figure, but a good-looking, high-caste Hindu, with a face full of anxious determination."

"That cooking equipage seems to be the burden of their lives: as troublesome as a white elephant."

"We should think it so," said Mr. G., "but it is amazing the pains

they will take to maintain the prejudices of their caste. If we were only half as earnest in keeping our consciences clear of offence!"

"Well, how did the Sikh fare?" bringing him back to his story.

"He walked off calmly and collectedly into this Babylonish wilderness, full of the importance of his mission. Here and there he inquired for the Kaiser-i-Hind: not a word of English could he speak. Still he went on and on, yet as chance would have it, moving in a circle and never leaving the East end. At night he was found crouched on a doorstep, shivering in his blanket, half frozen with cold. The police took him to the Poplar Union. Here he was visited by Mr. S. the missionary, to whom he related his story. He was told his case was hopeless: the Kaiser-i-Hind would never see him; could not help him even if she did so. He persevered; found his way to the India Office, that of course could and would do nothing for him. At last, one night, he was brought to Mr. S. the missionary's house, cold, gaunt and starving. Here he felt was a haven of refuge, a friend who would take him in hand. Nature was exhausted by suffering; all considerations of caste and religion were thrown to the wind. He squatted himself down on the rug before the fire; if he could he would have got into the fender; he ate with the missionary and his family, nor troubled himself about his cooking apparatus that he had thrown aside. His days of endurance were over; he was even reconciled to the failure of his mission, his one hope now being to get back to India. But he had no money, and this was a difficult matter to arrange. It was done at last. The P. and O. Company agreed to take a reduced fare, and a lady came forward and paid it for him. Three days after he landed at Bombay he called on the captain, dressed like an Indian gentleman, in grand Oriental attire. It is satisfactory to know that his gratitude was heartfelt and unbounded. 'If these are the principles of the Christians,' he said, 'there must be infinite good in their creed. I am greatly moved to throw in my lot amongst them. Tell Mr. S. that I can never cease to remember him.' And that is the end of my story, and here we are at the Rest."

"Did he become a convert?" we asked, interested in the fate of this persevering Hindu.

"I know not," replied the missionary. "The case came more under Mr. S.'s notice than under mine. He has to do with the Rest; I have not. He takes the Hindus, I chiefly the Chinese and Japanese. He may be here to-night. You see, it is not a bad building, either in point of size or importance."

It was of red-brick, not beautiful, but solid, and capable, apparently, of accommodating a great number. In front of it were notices in Persian and Bengali characters, necessary perhaps once upon a time, but necessary no longer; the Rest is too well known.

"Europeans are not admitted," said Mr. G. "It is strictly for Orientals: no building could contain both. Let us enter."

We found ourselves in a large hall or room, lighted with gas and warmed with a blazing fire evidently appreciated by a small crowd of Orientals. Others were scattered about the rooms; reading, talking, all cheerfully disposed. Mr. S. happened to be there, and came forward.

"You are just in time for me to give you welcome," he said. "I had wished them good-night and was on the point of leaving."

"And as Mr. S. is here, I will say good-night instead," said Mr. G. "I cannot leave you in better hands, and shall now be in time for my train."

"You must not think these men are all destitute," said Mr. S. when we were alone and had turned to them. "Some are, but some are not, and it is only the destitute who are fed here free of charge. There are, alas, too many of them. They trifle away their money, or they are unfortunate and cannot get work. It is melancholy to think what their privations would be without this Rest to come to."

"Has it been long in existence?"

"The idea was first started in the magazine of the London City Mission in 1877. I often wonder what London would do without this Society. It is bad enough, for evil abounds and good is of slow growth: but if the City Mission were not, our courts and slums, ay, and a grade above them, would be in darkness and heathendom. The Established Church cannot pretend to reach a tenth part of the plague spot. But we are not here to discuss such matters," added the missionary. "It grows late. Let us make the round of the building. This good fellow will accompany us," placing his hand on the shoulder of a young man who stood near to us, evidently interested in what was said. "He is an Arab, and unfortunately one of the destitute ones just now: but he is quick and has brains and makes himself useful in the place as a sort of mild overseer. He will soon leave us, however."

The Arab was short and dark, handsome and well formed, with keen black eyes and a most intelligent expression; his English fairly good and ready; his appearance of a better grade than those about him.

"I come from Morocco," he said, when we asked him his country; and on hearing that we also knew a little of Morocco, his eyes glistened, and a set of white even teeth shone out in laughter.

"Do you know Tangiers, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, we knew it well, and thought it one of the most interesting towns in the world."

"I have lived in Tangiers," he said, so delighted that he evidently looked upon us as half a compatriot. "I know Fez and other parts. Had we been to Fez?"

"No. Travelling in Morocco was dangerous. Some day if the danger passed, we hoped to see and know it all."

The face clouded. "It is true," he said. "I have myself seen

much cruelty. I wish England would come with her army and make her no more cruel and savage."

We wished so too, though it would probably be at the expense of some of the picturesque element; but that being a consideration beyond the province of the little Arab, was left unsaid.

We passed into a passage at the back of the building, leading to rooms and dormitories given up to special races. It would not do to mix them. Here, too, in little corners of the passage, perfumed sticks were smouldering, lit by one or other as a propitiatory charm. We entered a room given up to the Hindus. A wooden partition ran down from the centre through three parts of the length. Within the partition was a long row of narrow beds. The space outside the partition was their sitting-room.

Two of them were squatted on the floor. We were surprised to find the game they were playing was chess; and a by no means elementary game. Two others had squatted a little way off with a couple of musical instruments; a tum-tum, and something else still more barbarous.

"Play us something," said Mr. S., a little rashly.

They needed no pressing. A hideous discord rose upon the air, accompanied by nasal and terrible voices. Our hair stood on end like the frightful porcupine, as Mrs. Malaprop would have said. Every nerve jarred, but we bore it with a courage worthy of Nelson or Wellington. Apparently the performance had no ending; and they would have gone on through the night, conceiving us in paradise, had not the missionary thanked them and turned away. Some were simply sprawling and doing nothing, making the place a Rest in every sense of the word. The heat was stifling.

"And the more stifling, the happier they are," said Mr. G. "Salamanders every one of them, who never seem warm enough. These men are all Mahometans, and we do our best to convert them to Christianity. Whether they accept it or not, it is surprising how interested they are in the great truths unfolded in the New Testament."

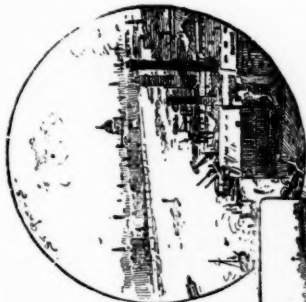
In an adjoining room, given over to Celestials, they had all gone to bed; but one or two of them looked up and greeted the missionary, and words passed in what to us was an unknown tongue. We went upstairs and saw large empty rooms, swept and clean, where they dine. There were other rooms in the basement where they live, and where surely even the Hindus must feel themselves in a paradise of heat. Everything was conducted on an excellent system, and cordiality and good will abounded.

"If there is a fault, it seems to us that the men are too happy here; in danger of making no effort to leave," we remarked.

"A danger we guard against," replied Mr. G. "We take care that they don't trespass unduly, or impose upon the privilege. And now I think we must depart ourselves. It grows late. Pray come again. Come when you may, you will be welcome, and will always find some

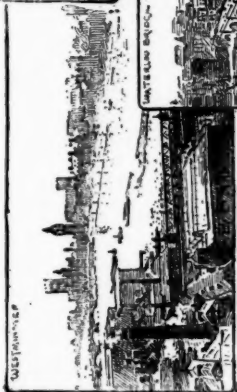
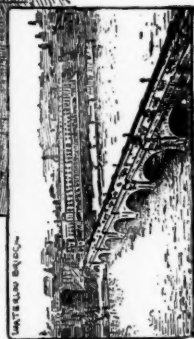
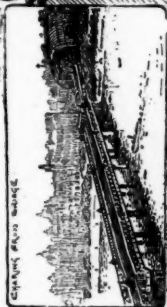
fresh faces and new experiences. The study of human nature is inexhaustible, even amongst Orientals and the dark-skinned. The Indians, indeed, are a most remarkable people, with an immense amount of mystery and romance about them."

So we parted; Mr. G. turning still more eastward, where all is



so full of pathos, when one realises the almost impossibility of any change in the existing state of things. But though evil cannot be exaggerated, it is a question whether the bare misery of the East-end people has not been overdrawn. For the most part they are not unhappy. Here and there are small colonies, plague spots, at which one shudders; but take them collectively, as a body apart, and their circumstances might be worse than they are. It is the moral degradation, the aimlessness of life, the absence of any wish to rise above their atmosphere, that forms the sad side of the picture. And in these days, lawless, irreligious, over-populated, there is little chance of improvement. They do not want it—there's the difficulty.

We turned our face westward; but finding it was the exact hour for meeting Mr. Jim Dixon, decided to accompany him down the river again through the Night Watches. The night was clear, the stars were brilliant; better have the rare experience than waste the hours



in sleep. The river attracted us as the pole the needle, as sunshine draws the shower. It is another world ; a world of enchantment, full of exquisite outlines and suggestiveness.

Jim Dixon was at his door as we turned into the quiet street in which he and his singular mother lived. It was quite deserted.

"I felt you would come, sir, and was on the look-out," said Jim, as he came towards us. "It is a fine night, and we shall have a lovely run down. I am going further than Blackwall this time, but can land you there if you wish it."

"How far are you going, Jim?"

"As far as Barking Reach, sir. It's beyond Woolwich, you know ; lies between Margaretness and Crossness. I'm going up the creek, and can land you near the old town if you like to come as far. A train would soon run you up to London."

The *Angelina* was true to her time ; she was not of those who are capricious in their affections ; age would never wither nor custom stale her infinite charm. Under the bright stars, her mast leaning, her brown sails half unfurled, she looked a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Once more we glided into the basin ; then out into the river itself, just at the end of the Lower Pool, turning into the sharp bend of Limehouse Reach. Our journey, aided by a very gentle breeze, was slow and stately. There was much craft on the river, moored for the night. We slowly made way round Limehouse Reach and Greenwich Reach, encircling the historical Isle of Dogs. We passed Deptford, where the East-end element as well as the historical abounds. It was here that Henry VIII. gave a grant to the mariners of England for a brotherhood of the Holy Trinity, out of which has developed the present Trinity Board, whose meetings are no longer held in the great hall at Deptford, but on Tower Hill. It was here that the great Elizabeth came on board Drake's ship, *The Golden Hind*, in which he had gone round the world, whilst his ladye-love waited for him in patience in her Somersetshire home. And here, having dined royally, Elizabeth knighted Drake, and in his own cabin he rose up Sir Francis. The whole scene passed before us in the Night Watches. For long the cabin, after the ship was laid by, was converted into a banqueting hall for visitors from London ; and when it went to pieces a chair was made out of some of the wood and presented to the University of Oxford. The Creek looked tempting ; and we were almost sorry that the *Angelina* in stern pursuance of duty glided away from this enchanted spot ; but she was not of those who wander into by-paths. Then came the outlines of Greenwich, hushed and stately. Everything inside and out at peace, the cadets only dreaming of Pandemonium.

Circling round and upwards, we slowly entered Blackwall Reach, with all its ship-building yards at rest, to the Point, opposite the station. No ; we would not land here—would not desert the *Angelina* and her pilot. We had taken a long time in coming,



sometimes hardly moving; sometimes not moving at all as the breeze lulled, and we waited patiently under the stars until the next handful of wind came up. So Blackwall Station was passed when the Night Watches were almost over, and six bells would usher in the Morning Watch in the darkness of the night. Huge vessels stood outside both the Victoria and Albert Docks, waiting for daylight.

"These reaches often give one a lot of trouble to navigate," said Jim, as we slowly moved along. "The tides and currents are capricious; you have to be up to them. Now they set strongly for one shore, now for the other, in a sort of reaction. It runs round the bights and swirls and eddies, and washes over you if you get into its trough, just changing its tactics when the flow turns to ebb. If the helmsman happens to fall asleep going down river, he is pretty sure of a rough waking."

"Has it ever happened to you, Jim?"

"No, never. I don't know what it is to feel sleepy until I lie down, and my head touches the pillow; not always then. I don't know how it is, but my brain always seems crowded with all sorts of thoughts, one thought chasing another. Sometimes I don't even understand them myself. It is just as if some one whispered them to me who knew more of things than I do. I often wonder what they would make if I could write them down; whether they would be books worth reading, and I should read them wondering where it all came from."

Clearly Jim had been destined to better things; but an untoward fate had stepped in and warped his destiny. That he spoke more or less like a gentleman, made few slips in grammar or accent, was not surprising after seeing his mother. Had he suddenly come into £10,000 a year, he would soon have been equal to his position; and any small lapse from the conventional groove would have been put down by an indulgent world to originality. He on whom fortune smiles may count on the world's favour.

The night wore on. The river widened a little. A faint glimmer of dawn sprang up in the east; that strange, unearthly light crept over nature, so suggestive of a world beyond. Then came sunrise, and Barking Creek with its muddy banks, into which the *Angelina* turned. It was no tempting by-path this time, like Deptford Creek, but the straight course of duty.

Up the winding, capricious creek we went, to right and left. It would be navigable for the next four hours. The low banks were disturbed by the wash made by the *Angelina*, slow and gentle though her progress. The flat country on either side was full of the repose of early morning. The sun shot above the horizon red and glowing, soon to pass into pale gold as it travelled upwards. The stars all went in; there was not a cloud in the sky; the air was clear and fresh and invigorating.

"This is worth all one's night-work," said Jim, rising to the occasion, expanding his chest with deep breaths. "I always feel as hungry as a hunter on such a morning. If a roast sheep were put before me, I think I could finish it. I am sure, sir, you don't regret coming down. I can't conceive anything more delightful than this, in spite of those ugly factories. It's better than all the balls one reads of and all the crowded rooms of London. I often wonder what people find to talk about who meet day after day and night after night, and always the same old round: whether what they talk about is worth saying and worth listening to. I'm quite sure I could never do it. I'd rather go and camp out in some desert, where my own thoughts would have time to grow. Isn't this magnificent!" standing straight up and expanding his chest with more deep breaths.

It certainly was so. A scene and a calm delight of which one could never tire. A whole week might have passed by, day succeeding night and night day, without fear of monotony. The world was not astir; we had it all to ourselves; on either side nothing stirred as yet. But presently the outlines of quaint old Barking came into view against the morning sky; signal that our cruise in the *Angelina* was over.

The Night Watches and the Morning Watch were long past when we reached our moorings. A short walk led to the railway-station, and a train, as it happened, would start for London in five minutes. This we attributed to the influence of Jim's good genius, since in our case we invariably arrive when the guard's van is just disappearing.

Jim had insisted on deserting the *Angelina* and accompanying us to the station. The last word he uttered was a hope that we might some day make a third voyage on the barge; and the last we saw of him was a manly figure turning, after the last carriage had left the platform, back to its moorings. In spite of all, Jim Dixon was to be envied.



## LAME LIZBETH.

BY T. W. SPEIGHT.

## I.

WHEN the clock had struck ten, Lame Lizbeth began to feel somewhat uneasy at her father's non-arrival. It was a rare thing for Reuben Mayes to be from home at that hour of the night. He had started at seven o'clock to walk into Westwood, three miles away, with the avowed intention of spending an hour in the company of an old friend who had lately taken up his abode in that somewhat sleepy hamlet.

Quitting the house, and leaving the door ajar, Lizbeth went down the garden path as far as the little gate which opened on the high road, and stood there for some minutes leaning upon it, and straining her eyes in the direction her father would have to come. It was a warm night towards the end of July, and the moon was nearly at the full.

At length her waiting was rewarded. She discerned her father's figure in the distance, and at once hurried back indoors in order to prepare his supper of bread-and-milk, with which simple meal it was his invariable habit to wind up the day.

Three minutes later Reuben Mayes entered the little sitting-room. He was a hale, bronzed-looking man of sixty, with a pleasant, open face, and something about him which seemed to smack of a breezy out-of-doors existence, due perhaps to the fact that for many years he had been head gamekeeper to Sir James Elwyn of Netherdene. Now, however, he was clerk-in-charge of the little railway-station of Standale, a position he owed to the influence of Sir James's eldest son, who was one of the directors of the line. In a tussle with some poachers Reuben had been injured internally, rendering it advisable that some easier mode of life should be found for him. When we make his acquaintance he had been established a twelvemonth at Standale. Both his manners and his speech were influenced by his having been brought much into contact with his superiors.

At this time his motherless daughter was just turned nineteen. She owed her appellation of Lame Lizbeth to an accident which had befallen her when a child. Greatly daring, she had climbed to the topmost fork of an apple-tree in the Netherdene orchard, with the result that she overbalanced herself, fell, and broke her ankle. A blundering practitioner set the bone improperly, the consequence being that Lizbeth was rendered lame for life. But for her pro-

nounced limp in walking, nowhere could have been found a straighter or more graceful maiden, and not many fairer to look upon. Her lameness notwithstanding, Reuben Mayes was exceedingly proud of his daughter. A very good reason had he for being so.

To-night Lizbeth, accustomed to read her father's every mood, saw at once that he was brimming over with news of some kind; and, indeed, he scarcely gave himself time to lay aside his hat and cane before he began.

"I need scarcely tell thee that John Lees and his wife were very glad to see me, and very welcome they made me. After we had sat awhile, talking over old times and so forth, in popped a couple of neighbours—women—evidently intent on a gossip with Mrs. Lees. So John and I took our hats and crossed the common to the *White Swan*, where we found seats under one of the trees on the green at the back of the house, after which we ordered a couple of glasses of old ale and two long pipes.

"Seemingly there was no lack of company in the bar, and John and I hadn't been pulling long at our pipes before there reached us a noise as of two men at high words with one another. Then presently the two came out on the green, followed by others. And who think'st thou the pair of quarrellers were? Why, none other than thy cousin, Tom Brooksby, and Black Ian, the ganger, a fellow I never could abide."

An involuntary "Oh!" escaped Lizbeth, and the delicate colour faded out of her cheeks.

"When they had got fairly out on the green," continued Reuben, "Tom was the first to speak. Says he to the other:

"'And now, if you've anything more to say, let's hear it. Only, no more name-calling, Master Ian—there's been overmuch of that already—unless you want to have the life half shaken out of you and then to be kicked into the middle of the road.' He spoke very quietly and with a bit of a smile; but his eyes were half shut and there was not a morsel of colour in his lips, and at such times Tom is not to be trifled with."

"And what had Ian Pengarthen to say to that?" asked Lizbeth, as she covered her father's basin of bread-and-milk with a plate in order to keep it warm.

"Give me time, lass—Ian stood there with hunched shoulders and chin thrust forward, glaring at Tom with those eyes of his which always put me in mind of a half-tamed wild animal. 'You think yourself a very fine fellow, Mr. Tom Brooksby, don't you?' he said, and his voice had a sort of snarl in it. 'But, if you want to hear the truth, you're no better than a common sneak and liar.' Hardly were the words out of his mouth before Tom took a stride forward, and his clenched right hand went quickly up to his side. 'Go,' he said; 'go before I do you an injury!' Ian had stepped nimbly back so as to avoid the expected blow. One hand was thrust inside his

waistcoat. He now withdrew it, grasping an open knife, and, before anybody could interfere, had sprung at Tom, aiming a stab at him as he did so. Fortunately Tom was too quick for him. A blow on Ian's wrist sent the knife spinning into the air, and next instant he found himself gripped round the throat with a hand of iron. He was now at Tom's mercy, who thrust him backward step by step, and half choked, through the side door into the village street. There a last shove and a sudden loosening of his grip, sent Ian sprawling on his back in the middle of the road, where he was left to pick himself up as he best could, Tom speaking never a word all the while.

"By this time the knife was in the landlord's keeping, who vowed that on no account should Ian have it again. Tom, after washing his hands at the pump, went back indoors without having set eyes on me, and there seemed no occasion for me to go near him."

Lizbeth had scarcely seemed to breathe as her father went on with his narrative. Now she drew a long inspiration and said: "But I thought Tom was a teetotaler, and not in the habit of entering public-houses."

"A teetotaler he is; says that as an engine driver it doesn't do for him to drink. He had gone to the *White Swan* to get a bottle of port, a present on his part, most likely—for his mate, Mark Davis, who is just getting round after a long bout of illness."

"Tom is always doing somebody a kindness," murmured the girl.

"Thou doesn't ask, Lizbeth, what the quarrel was about," said Reuben after a pause, as he rubbed his gouty knee with the palm of his hand. "But, maybe thou canst guess, and need'st no telling."

"No, father; how should I guess?"

"Ah, ha!" laughed Reuben. "And yet it's as plain as a pikestaff. What but a woman is at the bottom of half the mischief that happens? And a woman it is in this case."

"A woman!" echoed Lizbeth, in the tone of one who can scarcely credit the evidence of her ears.

"And as fine and comely a young woman as a man need wish to clap eyes on: tall, with black eyes, cherry lips, and a dimple in her chin. I made it my business to have a look at her before coming away. It seems that she's niece to Mrs. Bence, who keeps the smallware shop, and has come to help her aunt in the business. Of course she had not been long at Westwood before she had a lot of young sparks after her (it was the waiter at the *White Swan* who told John Lees and me all this), and at first she took it into her head to favour Ian Pengarthen more than any of the others. It seems a queer fancy on her part. But there! who can account for a young woman's fancies? But presently Cousin Tom comes along—what brought him to Westwood first, being to see his sick friend, Mark Davis—and from the moment he begins to make eyes at my lady,

Ian and the rest are nowhere. At length, it would appear, Ian gets worked up to such a pitch that he can't stand it any longer, and so takes the first chance that comes in his way to pick a quarrel with Tom. That, perhaps, is hardly to be wondered at, but to try to stab him! That's not an Englishman's way of settling one's quarrels."

He ceased, and drew his chair a little nearer the table.

"And now, lassie, I'll get on with my supper. No wonder we have seen so little of Master Tom lately. The rogue has had other fish to fry. Well—well; it only needs a pair of bright eyes and two cherry lips to play havoc with a young man's heart."

## II.

It may be as well to remark here that the events with which our narrative has to do happened nearly half a century ago. At that time the Wellingford and Brimington Railway had only been opened some half-dozen years. It was one of those lines, connecting two or more important provincial towns, of which several were projected about that time, which ultimately in some cases, went far towards ruining their promoters, while in others they resulted in thumping dividends. It was the destiny of all such merely local lines sooner or later to be absorbed by one or other of the great trunk railways.

Meanwhile, the Wellingford and Brimington called itself, and was, an independent railway, its length being forty-nine and a quarter miles, and its head-quarters being at the former town.

From this busy centre of many industries the little station of Standale was seven miles distant. So insignificant was the amount of business done there that Reuben Mayes and one porter comprised the entire staff. The porter, David Grimes by name, lived in Standale village, which was nearly a mile away from the station, and was not visible from it, owing to its being situated in a hollow. Reuben's house was about three hundred yards from the station proper. The company had found it there when they bought the land, and it had saved them the expense of building another.

So little consideration in those days did the requirements of the people of Standale meet with at the hands of the railway company that, except on market days, no train, either up or down, stopped there between half-past six in the evening and eight o'clock in the morning. For thirteen hours and a half out of the twenty-four Reuben Mayes was his own master.

Although the Tom Brooksby of whom mention has been made always addressed Reuben as his uncle and Lizbeth as his cousin, the relationship between them was not quite so close as the terms implied, Tom's father having merely been first cousin to Reuben. But Tom had been brought up in the same village as Lizbeth, and they had



been much together as youngsters, although the boy was several years the elder.

By-and-by, Tom, who was of an enterprising disposition, had gone out into the world, and had been lost sight of for a number of years, only to reappear unexpectedly one day at the little station. After sundry failures in other directions, he had taken to engine-driving for a living, and, as such, had found employment abroad. At length, however, he had grown homesick, and here he was, hoping through the influence of Sir James Elwyn—who in years gone by had been beholden to his father in certain electioneering matters—to obtain a berth on the Wellingford and Brimington railway; and, sure enough, at the end of six weeks he received the coveted appointment.

Those six weeks he spent under Reuben's roof. It was the happiest time of Lizbeth's life, for before it came to an end she had grown to love this big handsome cousin, with his blond silky beard, and his laughing blue eyes, as bright as a May morning—not in the sisterly way in which she had loved him in years gone by, but after a far sweeter and more dangerous fashion. That he should condescend to return her love was what she neither hoped nor expected, in such self-depreciation did she hold herself. For was she not a cripple? and to dream that cousin Tom would care to wed such an one as she would have been the veriest madness. All she asked was to be allowed to go on loving him in secret, seeing him from time to time—generally on Sunday afternoons when he would walk over from Wellingford, returning by the evening train—and looking forward between whiles to his next visit as to the one sunny break in the quiet monotony of her daily existence.

Tom Brooksby had not yet been promoted to drive a passenger-train, but had been promised the first vacancy. His present duties consisted in driving the "up express goods" between Wellingford and Brimington, and the "down mineral" on the reverse journey, neither of which trains stopped at Standale. But Lizbeth knew to a minute when they were due to pass the little station—the "goods" between nine and ten o'clock at night, and the "mineral" at an early hour in the morning.

If she was not always awake so as to hear the latter, she made a point of listening for the former, and as soon as she heard it in the distance, she would cease from whatever she happened to be doing and wait, with a faint, happy smile, till it had gone thundering past, after which she would whisper to herself, "Good night, dear Tom, and Heaven guard you!" And then, if she happened to be alone, she would sing a verse of the evening hymn.

Ian Pengarthen, commonly known as Black Ian, the man who picked the quarrel with Tom Brooksby, and who was reported to hail from Cornwall, was the head ganger, or foreman of the plate-layers, for that section of the railway which included Standale station. He was a lean, wiry, olive-skinned man, with a ragged beard and

moustache and a mop of black, crinkly hair. He had seen something of the world, and when he chose, which, however, was not often, he could talk fluently, and not without a spice of cleverness, on a variety of topics. It was probably this "gift of idle words," in conjunction with his adroit flattery of her, which, prior to the appearance of Tom Brooksby on the scene, had caused Bessie Wybush to regard him with such favourable eyes.

### III.

BUT if Lame Lizbeth had assured herself, and had actually succeeded in believing, that she could go on loving her cousin Tom without looking or hoping for any return beyond that brotherly affection which he had always accorded her, the affair assumed a very different aspect now she had been told that his love was given to another. More than once she had said to herself, "Some day, I suppose, Tom will marry;" but such a possibility had hitherto seemed so vague and far-off that the thought of it had never really troubled her. But to be told what her father had just told her was to feel as if a knife had been thrust into her bosom. That night was the bitterest her young life had hitherto known.

The following Sunday brought Tom, after a three weeks' absence. Lizbeth had looked forward with feverish anxiety to his coming. Would he say anything, either to her or her father, about that which, although he knew it not, affected her so closely? Perhaps, after all, there was nothing more between him and Miss Wybush than an ordinary flirtation! Her heart clutched at the hope as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

Nowhere was there a more straightforward young fellow than Tom Brooksby, or one who had fewer concealments of any kind, and he had not been ten minutes in the house before he out with the news with which he had come fully charged. He had proposed to and had been accepted by Miss Wybush, he told them, and the wedding was to take place in about three months' time. He was too pre-occupied to notice the death-like pallor which overspread Lizbeth's delicate features, or how her small, white teeth bit into her under-lip.

Reuben, in his bluff, hearty way, did not fail to congratulate his young relative, after which the latter turned smilingly to Lizbeth. The girl drew a long breath, and then in low steady tones, said:

"And I, too, congratulate you, Tom, and from the bottom of my heart wish you every happiness."

Then Reuben went on to relate how he had been present at the scene between Tom and Ian Pengarthen.

"And if I were thee, lad," he added, "I would keep a wary eye about me as far as he's concerned. He would have taken thy life

once—what's to hinder him from trying to do it again? He'll scheme for his revenge, thou mayst depend on't—if not in one way then in another. There's bad blood in him, Tom, so beware."

"Have no fear, uncle. I'll keep my eyes open," replied Tom lightly; after which, having so many pleasanter subjects to occupy his mind, he never gave his uncle's warning another thought.

That night, when at length Lizbeth fell asleep, she had a dream, in which she saw Black Ian creeping stealthily through some underbrush on the trail of Tom, with one hand grasping a long knife. Then, while Tom stooped to drink at a stream which ran through the wood, she saw Ian steal up behind him, and awoke with a scream as the knife was being plunged into her cousin's back.

From the date of Tom's last visit, Lizbeth became possessed by a burning desire to see for herself what sort of a girl this was who had made such an easy capture of her cousin's heart, and before long chance gave her the wished-for opportunity.

Saturday, which was market-day at Wellingford, always brought an influx of passengers to Standale station, and on those occasions Lizbeth made a point of helping her father in the booking-office. On the Saturday but one following Tom's mention of his engagement, Lizbeth was in the little office, issuing tickets for the market train, when her father, who had been busy outside, opened the door and said:

"Who think'st thou is on the platform? Why, none other than Miss Wybush! I knew her again the moment I set eyes on her. She's come with her aunt in a pony trap, most likely to meet somebody by the train from Brimington. If thou would'st care to have a peep at her, now's thy time."

Lizbeth cared very much. Her cheeks flushed and then paled, and for a moment or two she felt as if she were about to choke. Only a short half-minute could she spare from her duties, but that would be enough for her purpose. There was no need for her father to point out Miss Wybush, as the latter stood with her face turned in the direction of the coming train, which was now visible in the distance. Lizbeth's eyes picked her out instinctively. One long intent look, and then she was back at the window, busy with her tickets.

Ten minutes later the train had come and gone, and the little station was again given over to solitude. Lizbeth sat alone in the office, her face covered with her hands.

"No wonder he fell in love with her," she moaned. "Who could help doing so? Oh, in comparison with her, I must look to others like what I feel myself to be—a faded weed!"

You foolish Lizbeth! If you but knew it, to compare Miss Wybush with yourself would be like comparing a flaunting peony with the fresh pure loveliness of an arum lily.

## IV.

THERE came an afternoon, about three weeks after Tom Brooksby had brought the news of his engagement, when Lizbeth set out for the village of Berryash, three and a half miles away, on an errand for her father. She took with her, to help her along, a cherrywood walking-stick, mounted with silver, a birthday present from Cousin Tom.

She was detained much longer than she had hoped to be, and by the time she was able to start for home the sun had set, and the gloomy overcast evening was rapidly closing in. The wind blew in fitful melancholy gusts, and Lizbeth told herself that before morning the long drought would have come to an end.

The road was a cross-country one and very lonely, but she was not in the least afraid. As she went along she sang in a low voice a verse of one or other of the many hymns she knew by heart; and yet, poor girl, her thoughts were anything but cheerful ones. When about half-way, she came to a stile leading to a footpath through the fields, by taking which she would cut off a considerable slice of the remaining distance. After hesitating a few seconds, she crossed the stile. The field-path could not well be lonelier than the road she had left.

By this time the August night was nearly as dark as it would be. The sky was overcast, but the white riband of road through the lush meadows showed faint and dim, and there was no fear of her wandering from it. She had traversed it once already by daylight, and she knew that a little way before it debouched into the main road to Standale it crossed a footbridge over the railway, on the other side of which there was a short cut to the station, three hundred yards away.

After crossing the stile Lizbeth sang no more. Her ankle began to pain her, and she leaned more heavily on her stick. Her heart felt like lead. The great void night, with its eerie inarticulate whispers, as the gusts came and went fitfully, with its shrouded heavens and its immeasurable stretches of blackness about her feet across which she moved, the merest speck seemed to her a meet emblem of her dark and empty life.

After a time she began to draw near the footbridge. Suddenly her eyes, while scanning the darkness ahead of her, caught sight of something, which, on the instant, brought her feet to a stand. But after a couple of minutes or less it was gone as suddenly as it had come. So strange did it seem to her that she felt irresistibly impelled to wait where she was on the chance of its reappearance. After a little while it came again; a narrow fan of yellow light, apparently but a little way raised above the level of the ground, which, after moving a short space backward and forward, disappeared as instantaneously as before. What could it be? Instinctively, and almost

unconsciously, Lizbeth slowly advanced, still keeping to the footpath. What she had seen lay a little to the right of it. After a lapse of two or three minutes she beheld it for the third time, precisely as before. Then the girl told herself that to whatever cause it might be due, it originated either on or close to the railway, and therewith came the determination to do what in her lay to fathom the mystery.

Advancing rapidly now, but more cautiously than before, she gradually drew near the bridge—a wooden structure, reached by a flight of eight or ten steps. Once again the light flashed out and disappeared, but she merely noted it and kept on her way. Noiseless as a shadow, and looking like a moving mark of blackness—she was wearing a dark grey cloak which reached nearly to her feet—Lizbeth stole to the foot of the bridge, and, after crouching there for a few seconds, began to climb the steps, pausing a moment or two on each to hold her breath and listen, till she reached the level of the summit.

Once there, she set herself to watch for the light, kneeling as she did so, and staring through the open-work fencing of the bridge. So long had she to wait that she began to fear her curiosity was doomed to go unsatisfied. But at length it flashed out, moving backward and forward as before over a few yards of ground. Lizbeth was now in a position to look down upon it. As she had surmised, it was on the railway itself, and not more than a score of yards away. But its origin and purpose remained none the less a puzzle. She waited, as if glued to the spot.

When next the light shone out it was in a fuller and broader stream than heretofore, sifting the darkness immediately around it, and making a space of twilight, in the heart of which Lizbeth's straining eyes now made out the form of a man moving to and fro, anon standing upright, and then stooping to his secret task, whatever it might be. Then all at once something struck home to her heart the conviction that he, whom she was watching, was none other than Ian Pengarthen! At first, wonder was her dominant feeling. Although, as head ganger, Ian was responsible for that particular section of the permanent way, what could he be doing there, working alone so far into the night? His men had "knocked off" for the day hours before.

But scarcely had she time to ask herself the question, before Ian took up the light, which had been resting in the "six-foot-way," and which Lizbeth now set down as emanating from a dark lantern, and moving slowly with it, seemed to be examining by its aid a certain length of outside rail of the iron-road, which gave forth a dull steely reflection as the light traversed its surface. And now, to her amazement, Lizbeth was enabled to make out that, to the number of ten or a dozen, the wooden wedges which act as holdfasts between the rails and the iron chairs on which the latter rest, had been knocked away; as also that three or four fish-plates, that is to say, the iron plates which serve to bind one rail to another, had been unbolted and cast

aside ; and lastly, that a number of iron spikes which pin the chairs to the sleepers were missing from their places. More than once Lizbeth had watched the plate-layers at work, removing a worn rail in order to replace it with a new one, and here, apparently was the same process in operation. But by what conceivable motive could Pengarthen be actuated in trying at that hour to remove or transfer a portion of the permanent-way? He might, perhaps, succeed in shifting a rail out of its position, but it was out of the question that, without help, he should be able to replace it with another.

But the light was shut off again while Lizbeth was still blankly wondering. Then of a sudden, her wonder was transformed into a great horror, before which her soul reeled and grew faint within her. Her dream had flashed across her memory, and in that flash, understanding had come to her. She saw it all. Ian Pengarthen was plotting his revenge!

In less than half-an-hour, the express goods, driven by Tom Brooksby, and travelling at the rate of thirty miles an hour, was due to pass Standale station. A minute later it would reach the spot where Black Ian was busy with his nefarious task, immediately beyond which point was a deep narrow ravine, spanned by a trestle-bridge. By the time the train was due, Ian would have succeeded either in removing a rail bodily from its bed, or in so far deflecting it from its normal position as to render a catastrophe inevitable. The engine with the vast momentum of the loaded waggons behind it would be thrown off the line, and crashing forward a few yards farther till it reached the trestle-bridge, would tear its way through the frail structure, and topple headlong into the gulf below. As in a moving picture, Lizbeth saw it all. Never, surely, did mind of man devise a more fiendish and cold-blooded scheme of revenge! For a little space longer the girl knelt there, huddled in a heap against the woodwork of the bridge, brain and feeling alike benumbed by the stress of the vision her imagination had conjured up, and by her utter powerlessness to avert the imminent catastrophe.

At the time of which we are writing, the electric telegraph system, so far as railways were concerned, was still in its infancy. It was in process of adoption by most of the big trunk lines, but to such local railways as the Wellingford and Brimington, it was as yet a stranger. Nowadays, in a like contingency, Lizbeth would merely have to telegraph to the nearest station, and so block the train, and then despatch another message to headquarters, detailing what she had done, and her reasons for acting as she had.

Lizbeth started and listened. A faint, far-off sound had reached her. The clock of the little church on the hill was proclaiming the half-hour after nine, and at seven minutes to ten the express goods was due.

"What ought I to do? What can I do?" she wailed. "Oh, Tom, is there no way of warning you?"



Her eyes, dimmed with tears of mingled desperation and despair, had unconsciously fixed themselves on the signal lamp, shining white and clear above the little station. Not many seconds had she been staring at it before she drew a long, quivering breath and rose slowly to her feet. It was as though an apparition had confronted her. For a little space she stood there helpless, with fast-pulsing heart and dizzy brain. Then, as if in response to some anguished but inaudible cry, the mists cleared, and her strength came back to her.

Treading lightly, and no longer heeding the pain in her ankle, Lizbeth now went swiftly down the stairs on the opposite side of the bridge, and then turning to the left, and, helped by her stick, raced as she had never raced before in the direction of the station, which it did not take her long to reach.

At once she made her way to the tall semaphore on which was fixed the signal lamp, her object being to change the "line clear" signal to that of "danger," in other words, to substitute the red light for the white one, warned by which Tom would be enabled to pull up his train in time to frustrate Black Ian's diabolical purpose.

She had watched David Grimes manipulate the signals many a time; but what was easy to him proved all but impossible to her, and for a few seconds she despaired of being able to shift the lever by means of which the change was effected. But at length, by an exertion of strength she would have been incapable of at another time, the lever was lifted to its place and fixed there with an iron pin, and the unwinking blood-red eye aloft took up the watch from which the milder light had been deposed.

The moon had risen by now, and the clouds had parted before her coming. The darkness was less absolute; objects some distance off had become dimly discernible. Lizbeth leaned wearily against the signal-post. Ten or twelve minutes more ought to bring Tom's train, after which——

She started violently. Something moving in the distance and rapidly drawing nearer had caught her wandering regard. It took her a moment or two to concentrate her faculties, and then her instinct rather than her sight told her that the hurrying figure was none other than Black Ian. Doubtless he had discovered the alteration of the signal and was bent on ascertaining by whose agency it had been effected. Lizbeth felt that it would be almost as much as her life was worth to be found there by him. She must hide herself—but where? There was not a moment to lose.

At the farther end of the platform there were a couple of empty earthenware crates waiting to be sent back to Brimington on the morrow. Lizbeth had seen them brought to the station a few hours before, and it now seemed to her as if their presence there was little short of providential. Swiftly she made for them, and then stooping, pulled one of them over her. If only Ian had not seen her, or did not take it into his head to look for her, she would be safe. Through

the open-work of the crate all his movements could be watched by her.

As she had surmised he would do, he at once made for the semaphore and proceeded to reverse the signal, changing back the red light to the white one, growling and blaspheming aloud as he did so. For some days he had been drinking heavily.

And now indeed Lizbeth's heart seemed to die within her. A very few minutes more would bring the train, and then God help the poor men in charge of her! There in her strange hiding-place, she prayed for them as she had never prayed for herself.

But what was Ian about to do next? After peering around as if the mystery of the changed signal were too much for his muddled comprehension, he set off in the direction of a wooden hut, about forty yards down the line, where his men were in the habit of storing their tools overnight. On reaching it, he unlocked the door and went inside. Now was Lizbeth's opportunity.

Two minutes later the key of the hut, which he had left in the door, was turned on Ian, and Lizbeth was speeding back to the semaphore. Once again, by an almost superhuman exercise of strength, she succeeded in lifting and fixing the lever which changed the white light to the red one. But already Ian was hammering at the door of the hut. Would it withstand him long enough to bring the train? No, she told herself despairingly that it would not. What door could stand against those fierce blows with a platelayer's hammer?

Again she fled, this time in the direction of the booking-office. It was locked up for the night, but she and her father had each a key. (Reuben, it may be remarked, was away at Westwood this evening on another visit to his friend John Lees.) In making for the booking-office she had an object in view, and a very desperate one it seemed to her. She had barely time to unlock the door, slip inside and turn the key, before Ian burst out of the hut, cursing louder than ever. This time, she told herself, he would be nearly sure to come in search of her. And so it proved. Perhaps he had caught a glimpse of her figure; in any case, he made direct for the office, but already Lizbeth was intent on the purpose which had taken her there.

That same afternoon Farmer Henschley, who had been out doing execution among the feathered marauders of his crops, had, for convenience sake, left his fowling-piece in the booking office, to be called for next day. There it was in a corner, and in a drawer close by were the powder flask, a bag of shot, and a box of percussion caps. Now, Lizbeth was not a game-keeper's daughter without knowing how to load a gun. But first she lighted the little oil-lamp, only, however, turning up the wick sufficiently to allow of her seeing what she was about. By this time Ian was at the door, shaking it and trying to force an entrance, but Lizbeth went calmly on with her task. Half a minute more and the gun was loaded, and the lamp

extinguished. Already to her ears was borne the growing thunder of the approaching train.

Apparently Ian had also heard it, for his hammering suddenly ceased, and next moment he was hurrying back to the semaphore, with the object of again reversing the signal, which still stood at "danger" as left by Lizbeth. But scarcely had he reached it and laid his hand on the lever before the girl's clear voice challenged him. He turned with a start, to see Lizbeth on one knee, with a gun pressed to her shoulder in position to fire.

"Ian Pengarthen," she cried, "if you touch that lever I will shoot you!"

A moment longer he stared, and then he broke into a jeering laugh. He had no faith in the reality of her threat. Besides, it was not likely that he was going to be balked of his revenge by a slip of a girl whom he could have broken across his knee. Without taking his eyes off her, his hand again sought and found the lever. Lizbeth saw the movement, and on the instant she took aim and fired. With a terrific yell, Ian staggered back and fell in a heap on the platform a few yards away.

When, three minutes later, Tom Brooksby, warned by the danger signal, pulled up his train alongside the platform, he found, on alighting from his engine, a fainting girl with a discharged gun beside her, and, some distance off, a groaning wretch who whined that he had been murdered in cold blood.

But the damage done to Black Ian proved to be no very serious matter, for Lizbeth had aimed low purposely, and when sundry leaden pellets had been extracted from his person, he was soon as well as ever. His diabolical attempt to wreck the express goods was rewarded with seven years' penal servitude.

The rest may soon be told. Within a month of the day fixed for her wedding, Miss Bessie Wybush ran off with a richer suitor than Tom Brooksby. Poor Tom recovered by degrees, and before spring came round had learnt to "thank his stars" for what he termed his "lucky escape." His eyes had been opened in the interim. When, one day in the course of the following summer, he stole an arm round Lizbeth's waist and asked her to be his wife, and when she replied: "What! marry a cripple like me? You surely would not do that, Tom?" his answer may be left to the imagination of the reader.

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## THE PROPHECY OF MUSIC.

"Music, sister of Sunrise, and herald of life to be."

A. C. Swinburne: "*Music: an Ode.*"

MUSIC, perhaps, as has been said of memory, helps more than any other agency to teach the soul of man that it is immortal.

Newman, speaking of the feelings stirred by music, asks, "Can it be that those mysterious yearnings of heart, and keen emotions, and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not where, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so; it cannot be."

One of the old poets, quaint John Norris of Bemerton, finds the same half stimulus, half satisfaction for his eternal longings in music. In a poem entitled "The Retractation" he thus retracts the charge of vanity he had made, with Solomon, against all sublunary things, withdrawing music, which he couples with friendship, from the imputation—

"But now, great Preacher, pardon me; ;  
I cannot wholly to thy charge agree,  
For Music sure and Friendship have no vanity.

No, each of these is a firm, massy joy,  
Which, though eternal, will not cloy.  
Here may the venturous soul live on, and find,  
Grasp what she can, that more remains behind.  
Such depths of joy these living springs contain  
As man t' Eternity can never drain.  
These sweets the truth of Heaven prove,  
Only there's greater bliss with saints above,  
Because they've better music there, and firmer love.'

So, too, the courtlier, if less spiritual, poet, Edmund Waller, in his dainty apostrophe to a lady on her singing, familiar to every one through Izaak Walton's quotation of it in 'The Compleat Angler,' pairs music with love as representative of the joys of Heaven—

"Peace, Chloris, peace, or singing die,  
That together you and I  
To Heaven may go;  
For all we know  
Of what the blessed do above  
Is—that they sing and that they love."

Milton, worshipping in fancy within the cloisters' dim, religious

light, gives voice to the rapture which a solemn music had power to awaken in him, bringing down celestial visions to his gaze—

“There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced quire below,  
In service high, and anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into ecstasies,  
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.”

It is of “Church Music” also that George Herbert sings—

“Now I in you without a body move,  
Rising and falling with your wings;  
We both together sweetly live and love . . .

Comfort, I’ll die! for, if you part from me,  
Sure I shall do so, and much more;  
But if I travel in your company,  
You know the way to Heaven’s door.”\*

Thoreau attributes this illuminative power to all music, as does Browning (in “Abt Vogler”) to the exercise of it—

“God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;  
The rest may reason and welcome, ’tis we musicians know.”

“Let us hear,” writes Thoreau, “a strain of music, and we are at once advertised of a life which no man has told us of, which no preacher preaches.” And, in greater detail—

“There are in music such strains as far surpass any faith which man has ever had in the loftiness of his destiny . . . Things are to be learnt which it will be sweet to learn. This cannot be all rumour. When I hear this I think of that everlasting something which is not mere sound, but is to be a thrilling reality, and I can consent to go about the meanest work for as many years as it pleases the Hindoo penance, for a year of the gods were as nothing to that which shall come after. What, then, can I do to hasten that other time, or that space where there shall be no time, and where these things shall be a more living part of my life, where there shall be no discords in my life.”

Not only that solemn music in which Milton delighted, not only on those sacred occasions to which Archbishop Trench refers—

“When, out of reach of earth’s dull chime,  
’Tis ours to drink with purged ears  
The music of the solemn spheres,  
Or in the desert to have sight  
Of those enchanted cities bright  
Which sensual eye can never see—”

But the very commonest strains may exercise the same transporting

\* Adelaide Procter, in her poem “Sent to Heaven,” known in Blumenthal’s setting as “The Message,” makes music the medium of conveying a message from one on earth to a friend passed into the unseen.”

power on the soul: "For even that vulgar and tavern-music," avows Sir Thomas Browne, "which makes one man merry, another mad, strikes in me a deep fit of devotion, and a profound contemplation of the First Composer. There is something in it of divinity more than the ear discovers."

Shakespeare does not fail of an allusion to this Heaven-suggesting influence of music. Lorenzo says to Jessica in "The Merchant of Venice" \*—

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
Sit, Jessica——"

Then, the music lifting the lover's thoughts at once from earth to Heaven, to the music of the spheres, and of "immortal souls"—

"Look how the floor of Heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims,—  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it!"

The wild woodland notes of the nightingale had the same exalting effect on Drummond which was wrought on Milton by the stately roll of organ music—

"What soul can be so sick, which by thy songs,  
Attir'd in sweetness, sweetly is not driven  
Quite to forget earth's turmoils, spites, and wrongs,  
And lift a reverend eye and thought to Heaven?  
Sweet artless songster, thou my mind doth raise  
To airs of spheres, yes, and to angels' lays."

Izaak Walton found a like miraculous charm in Philomela's song, which he conveys to us in words scarcely less musical than her notes—

"But the nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud music out of her little instrumental throat that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might well be lifted above earth and say, 'Lord, what music hast Thou provided for the saints in Heaven, when Thou affordest bad men such music on earth?'"

"Hark! hark! the lark at Heaven's gate sings,"

sings Shakespeare. Shelley's fancy also ascends with her song "to

\* Act v., Scene i.



Heaven—or near it," a reservation that would never have occurred to Shakespeare, even by way of rhyme—

"Hail to thee, blithe spirit—  
Bird thou never wert—  
That from Heaven or near it  
Pourest thy full heart  
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

It was the robin's homely song that inspired Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth's sister-in-law, with a thought of peace, even of rapture, at the prospect of death, which she expresses in the following lyric, "To a Redbreast—(in Sickness)." "Almost the only verses by our lamented sister," Wordsworth tells us, and which reveal so charming a fancy as to make one regret she should not have left us more—

"Stay, little cheerful Robin! stay,  
And at my casement sing,  
Though it should prove a farewell lay,  
And this our parting spring.

Though I, alas! may ne'er enjoy  
The promise in thy song;  
A charm, *that* thought cannot destroy,  
Doth to thy strain belong.

Methinks that in my dying hour  
Thy song would still be dear,  
And with a more than earthly power:  
My passing spirit cheer.

Then, little bird, this boon confer,  
Come, and my requiem sing,  
Nor fail to be the harbinger  
Of everlasting Spring."

A singer of to-day, Mr. Norman Gale, anticipates the same sweet office from the thrush—

"And while I journey to the distant Day  
That first shall dawn upon the eastern hills,  
Perchance some thrush will sing me on my way."

It was to the sound of music, played to him at his own request by his brother Karl, as Dr. Japp, in his 'German Life and Literature,' relates, that the gentle spirit of Novalis, which had ever kept in tune with Heaven, "free and happy, like a bird of passage," took its flight.

This desire for music in the hour of death, whether of birds or angels or through human agency, is given forcible utterance to by Norris in his poem entitled "A Wish"—

"Whatever blessing you my life deny  
Grant me, kind Heaven, this one thing when I die.  
I charge thee, guardian spirit, hear,  
And, as thou lov'st me, further this my prayer.

*The Prophecy of Music.*

When I'm to leave this grosser sphere, and try  
 Death, that amazing curiosity,  
 When just about to breathe my last,  
 Then, when no mortal joy can strike my taste,  
 Let me soft melting strains of music hear,  
 Whose dying sounds may strike death to my ear :  
 Gently the bands of life untie,  
 Till in sweet raptures I dissolve and die.

How soft and easy my new birth will be,  
 Help'd on by Music's gentle midwifery !  
 And I, who 'midst these charms expire,  
 Shall bring a soul well tuned to Heaven's quire."

Herrick, another enthusiast for music, has somewhat the same thought in his poem, "To Music, to becalm his Fever," which begins—

" Charm me asleep and melt me so  
 With thy delicious numbers  
 That, being ravisht, hence I go  
 Away in easy slumbers"—

and of which the last sweet stanza runs—

" Fall on me like the silent dew,  
 Or like those maiden showers  
 Which, by the peep of day, do strew  
 A baptime o'er the flowers.  
 Melt, melt my pains  
 With thy soft strains,  
 That, having ease me given,  
 With full delight  
 I leave this light,  
 And take my flight  
 For Heaven."

If the English are not a music-loving race, they have at least written diviner strains on music than probably any other nation on earth.

Dryden, in his "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," predicates of music that as it was through her power the spheres were first started on their course,

" So when the last and dreadful hour  
 This crumbling pageant shall devour,  
 The trumpet shall be heard on high,  
 The dead shall live, the living die,  
 And Music shall untune the sky."

Addison carries the ministry of music a step further in imagination than even Norris and Herrick. One might fancy he had caught an echo, through the strains of human art which he loved so well, of that

" Music of Paradise, which still is heard  
 When the heart listens——"

as Dyer, the forgotten poet of "The Fleece," has it, so exquisite is

his conception of music as the minister of welcome to the newly-arrived spirit, shaken with the struggle it has just gone through. It is in the Vision of Mirza, where Mirza discovered the genius sitting on the summit of the hill, who straightway applied his musical instrument to his lips and began to play upon it—

“The sound of it was exceeding sweet, and wrought into a variety of tunes that were inexpressibly melodious and altogether different from anything I had ever heard. They put me in mind of those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in Paradise, to wear out the impressions of the last agonies, and qualify them for the pleasures of that happy place.”

George Herbert, as Izaak Walton tells us, was wont to say of music—“That it did relieve his drooping spirits, compose his distracted thoughts, and raised his weary soul so far above the earth that it gave him an earnest of the joys of Heaven before he possessed them.”

P. W. ROOSE.

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### CHAINS.

I LEARNT to love, and I am sad thereby,  
For I have multiplied the springs of pain;  
Innumerable bonds mysteriously  
To all the universe my soul enchain.

All things allure, and by some viewless thread  
Bind me in fetters delicate and frail:  
The actual by its sunshine round me spread,  
The unknown by its secret and its veil.

A bird's song links my soul to ecstasies,  
A rose-leaf holds me in each velvet fold;  
A smile enthrals the vision of my eyes,  
A kiss will close my lips with seals of gold.

I am a prisoner to those I love—  
My life hangs on a word, a look, a tone;  
And if another's heart some anguish move,  
A chord is like to break within my own!

## A DISCONSOLATE DRAGOON.

## I.

"Mere friends are we, but friends the merest  
Keep much that I resign."—*R. Browning.*

TWO women in a shady, flower-scented drawing-room. Windows opening on to a smooth, green lawn; the river glistening in the sunlight; roses everywhere, and the nameless magic of summer in the air.

"Honestly now, Eva, you do care about him?"

"How can I tell? I have known him so short a time."

"Time! What has time to do with it?" asked the elder woman impatiently. "When you meet the man who is to influence the whole of your after life for good or evil, you know it at once; it is no question of so many weeks or months."

Eva Wallace glanced up at the speaker from the recesses of her low lounging-chair with a scrutinising and slightly-amused expression in her lovely hazel eyes. She took everything very easily, did this young person. "Life, love, all things," and the more complex emotions of her friend's nature, provided her with a never-failing source of interest.

"How intense you are, Ruth! Do sit down; it tires me to look at you. Since when have you taken Captain Kerr's affairs so deeply to heart?"

Mrs. Glyn paused in her rapid walk up and down the room, and, with a little laugh, subsided on to a couch, and relapsed into silence.

"Well," repeated Eva, "I am waiting for an answer."

"Do not give yourself away so unnecessarily, my dear child! You know you are dying to discuss him in spite of your assumed indifference. As for me, Ralph Kerr's interests and mine have generally been identical ever since our frilled petticoat and trouser days, and—well, friendship is a habit I cannot break myself of easily. I am old-fashioned, I admit."

"Were you ever more than friends, Ruth?" asked the girl, leaning forward to look at the pale, piquant face opposite her—a face which was apt to linger long in men's memories, notwithstanding its irregularity of feature.

"Why, of course not. Can you imagine anyone being able to refuse the irresistible Ralph? No, my dear; if you mean to accept him, do so with a clear conscience. This is not a case of 'Trespassers shall be prosecuted.' But how hot it is! The room is stifling——"

"I am quite cool," remarked Eva; and, indeed, she looked it in her white crêpe gown with its soft-falling laces.

During the pause which followed, Ruth Glyn's thoughts were busy with the past. Those free, happy days before her marriage when she and Ralph Kerr were inseparable companions. How pleasant it had been that summer before he went to Sandhurst! And what scoldings she had had to endure from her precise old aunt on her tom-boy propensities! How—— Here Eva's voice checked the flow of her reminiscences.

"Were you ever in love, Ruth?"

Mrs. Glyn returned to the present and stared at her friend.

"I have been married, my dear," she replied demurely.

"Pooh! what has that to do with it? Nobody could expect you to care two straws for a man who was old enough to be your father in the first place, and who spent his days examining beetles' legs in the second. By the way, why did you marry him, Ruth? I never quite fathomed that mystery."

"What a note of interrogation you are, Eva; and in this heat too! Well, I married Mr. Glyn chiefly because it was imperative I should marry somebody—at least, so aunt was always telling me—and there was no one else handy. I was nineteen, and he was forty-five; but, as my face was my fortune—such as it is—and he was the most eligible suitor on my limited horizon, I resigned myself to circumstances; and it turned out very well on the whole. He was fond of me in his way, I believe, next to his beetles, and I have nothing to reproach myself with in my conduct to him. Poor old dear, I miss him terribly!"

"What a perversity of fate that he should have lost so much money!" remarked Eva pensively, as the most tangible misfortune of her friend's wedded life presented itself to her eminently practical mind.

"Yes; that bank failure was an awful blow to him; he never really recovered the shock. And now I am nearly as poor as I was before, only I have a roof to cover me, and otherwise I should not have had that when aunt died."

"Marry again, Ruth; that is all you have to do. You are only thirty, and there are lots of men you could have if you gave them a little encouragement. There is Colonel——"

"Spare me!" interrupted the widow, rising to ring for tea. "Matrimony has no charms for me. I have enough to exist on, if not to live, as life is lived nowadays; and I have freedom. Let me keep it!"

Eva nestled down amongst her cushions with a low laugh.

"With all my heart, dear; only, if you place so much value upon freedom, why are you so anxious I should relinquish mine in favour of the friend of your childhood?"

A faint colour tinged the pallor of Ruth's cheeks.

"Oh, that is very different; you must marry. I have done my duty, you see; and, though I do not regret it, still I have no wish to repeat the experiment. Besides," she added gravely, "Ralph loves you, Eva. You must not disappoint him."

A doubtful expression crept into the girl's eyes.

"That is what I am never quite sure about," she said slowly. "He seems devoted and all that, but that is one of his ways with women. I have seen him look just the same at you sometimes—— How you fidget, Ruth; do sit down!—and I do not think it is in him to be very deeply attached to anybody except——"

"Except whom!" put in Mrs. Glyn hurriedly, as Eva paused with a malicious little smile on her lips.

"Except himself," she ended calmly; and Ruth sank back on her chair with a sigh of relief.

"What a queer girl you are!" she remarked after a moment's silence. "You profess to be selfish yourself, and not to believe in love and all that kind of thing, and yet you find fault with Ralph Kerr for following out your own theories of self first and one's neighbours after."

"You agree with me then that he is selfish?" asked Eva, languidly waving her black fan to and fro.

"He is a man," was Mrs. Glyn's prompt reply; "what would you have? There are one or two exceptions here and there; but, as a rule, every woman must make up her mind to play second fiddle to her husband or lover's own comforts and interests, and the sooner she learns this lesson the better. Oh, here is tea; what a relief! All the same," she continued, "I honestly think Ralph is in love with you, and I believe you care for him more than you will admit, even to me."

Eva's fair face flushed rosy red as she helped herself to cream and sugar.

"Well, he appeals to me more than any other man," she said. "He is handsome—there is no doubt of that—it is a pleasure only to look at him; and then he is a V.C.—that always counts. Of course he is poor; but I can afford to make a fool of myself in that way, and—— Yes, Ruth, I suppose it will all end as you wish!"

"I hope so, dear!" said Mrs. Glyn softly. "It is indeed what I wish."

Then she rose and went over to the open window, gazing with unseeing eyes at the green lawn and sunlit river.



II.

"Then, if thou wilt prove me, dear,  
Woman's love no fable,  
I will love thee half a year  
As a man is able."—*E. B. Browning.*

MEANWHILE, in the officers' quarters at Hounslow, a somewhat similar conversation was taking place between two men.

"When may I congratulate you, Kerr?"

The speaker was a short dark man of about forty, with a cynical mouth and keen, intelligent brown eyes.

Ralph Kerr looked up from the cigar he was lighting with a would-be indifferent manner, as he replied to this point blank question.

"Whenever you choose, my dear fellow; but I am quite in the dark as to the reason for this effusion on your part."

"Don't try to humbug me, old chap!" was the curt reply. "It is mess-room gossip already—'Beauty' Kerr caught at last; but I think you might have told me!"

"Hang it all, Carlton, there is nothing to tell as yet; you are too previous by a long way!"

"Glad to hear it," returned the other. "While there is time, there is hope, and it is a 'leap in the dark,' and no mistake. That French Johnny hit the nail on the head when he said that." And, having delivered himself of this profound remark, Lionel Carlton relapsed into silence.

Eva Wallace was right. Ralph Kerr, captain in the "slashing dragoons," was undeniably handsome. Tall and fair, with clearly-cut features and dreamy blue eyes, "beauty" Kerr had wrought great havoc in feminine hearts during his thirty-one years of life; and now, he told himself, it was time to sell his good looks to the highest bidder, a bargain in which he considered his future wife would be the gainer. His selection had fallen upon Eva Wallace, with her lovely face and large fortune. He had known her only a few weeks, it is true, but he had made good use of his time, and nothing now remained, in his opinion, but to put the important question. He felt pretty sure of his answer—dear little Ruth had paved the way for him with her friend—and the sooner it was all settled the better. At this point in his reflections, Mrs. Glyn's expressive face and laughing eyes floated before him in the blue curling smoke from his cigar. What chums they had been in their boy and girl days, and what a staunch, true little soul she was! If he cared for anyone it was for her; could he—but what folly! Love in a cottage would not suit her, and it would play the deuce with him, so he promptly dismissed the idea.

"I say, Carlton."

"Well?" returned his friend sleepily, from the recesses of his arm-chair.

"You know Mrs. Glyn, don't you?"

"Rather," replied Carlton emphatically. "It is a 'liberal education' to know her, as somebody says somewhere; sharpens up a fellow's wits, don't you know?"

"Confound your eternal quotations!" said Ralph irritably. "I want you to do me a good turn—will you?"

"Anything in reason," answered the other cautiously.

"Come to Richmond with me to-morrow afternoon, and pay her a visit. She has Miss Wallace staying with her, and——"

"And you want me to do the amiable to the widow while you make the running with the heiress, is that it?" interrupted Carlton.

"Well, I would rather talk to Mrs. Glyn than the fair Eva, any day, so I am your man. Where shall we meet?"

"Thanks, old fellow. I'll look you up at the club about four." And after a little more desultory chat, Lionel Carlton, briefless barrister and aspiring dramatist, took his departure, musing as he went on men, women, and things in general, and Ralph Kerr's love affairs in particular. These latter, so ran his thoughts, would work up very well into a comedy. "They are both more or less in love with him—that I could take my oath of, in spite of Mrs. Glyn's rôle of friendship—and if only the widow had the girl's money, I know which he would choose. I could make quite a pretty thing of it, I declare. Perhaps this visit to-morrow may prove dramatic. I shall watch the widow well."

Mrs. Glyn was alone in her flower-decked drawing-room overlooking the river when the two men were ushered in on the following day.

"You too, Mr. Carlton; what a pleasant surprise!" she exclaimed, as she gave him her hand. "I have seen nothing of you for ages! Eva is somewhere in the garden, Ralph," she went on, turning with a smile to her old play-fellow. "I wish you would go and tell her that tea will be here in ten minutes."

Ralph left the room obediently, and Lionel Carlton, true to his lately-formed resolves, applied himself to the study of his companion's expressive countenance.

"I suppose that is a case?" he remarked, waving his hand in the direction of the garden.

"I believe it will be one eventually," she answered slowly. "It would be a very good thing for him."

"And for her?" queried Carlton.

"Oh, of course; but there is no need for me to expatiate on Ralph's good qualities. He is an old friend of mine, you know."

"I know he is," he replied significantly. "And—well—he is not exactly a friend of mine; but we have been intimate for years—that's not quite the same thing as friendship, don't you know. But I think

they are suited to each other; they are, neither of them, troubled with a superfluity of heart."

"All the better," she answered quickly; "there is more chance of happiness for them so." Then with a change of tone, "I have a piece of news for you: guess what it is?"

"You are going to make some man supremely happy above his fellows?" he replied promptly.

Mrs. Glyn gave a scornful little laugh.

"I suppose that flowery speech means you think I am going to renounce my liberty? Not I! No; I heard last night of poor old Uncle Hervey's death, and it seems, that at the last, he quarrelled with the nephew who expected to get his money, and has left it to me instead. Something like fifteen thousand a year, the lawyer says, and that sweet old place in Surrey into the bargain. Now, is not truth far stranger than fiction?"

Ruth had intended to surprise her auditor, but the result far exceeded her liveliest anticipations.

Lionel Carlton sat speechless, staring at her in blank amazement, and—or so she fancied—with an expression of pity mingled with his astonishment.

What an irony of fate—so ran his thoughts—as he stammered out some words of congratulation. Kerr was probably at this moment proposing to Eva Wallace in the garden, and the woman he really cared for in the depths of his calculating heart was the greater heiress of the two.

"Does Kerr know?" he asked abruptly.

Mrs. Glyn flashed a rapid glance at him, and the colour which excitement had brought into her usually pale cheeks subsided as suddenly as it came.

"No; you are the first person I have told—except Eva, of course."

"Perhaps Miss Wallace will tell him."

"Why should she?" inquired Ruth, a trifle nervously. "They will probably have more interesting subjects of conversation. Here they are; do not say anything more," she added imploringly, and when Ralph and Eva entered the room simultaneously with the tea-tray, Mrs. Glyn and Mr. Carlton were gravely discussing the Irish question.

"You may congratulate me now if you like," remarked Kerr, an hour later, when he and Carlton were on their way back to town. "I put the question this afternoon."

"Well," said Lionel eagerly, "what answer did you get?"

"Oh, satisfactory on the whole. She will not decide at once; so like a woman that, to keep one dangling on the hook; wants a fortnight to consider; but I know pretty well how it will end." And he gave a complacent twist to the ends of his elaborately-waxed moustache.

"Did Mrs. Glyn tell you any news when you and she were at the window together?" inquired Carlton, after a moment's silence.

"No—what do you mean?"

"Well; I am not sure if it is a secret, but she has had an unexpected windfall. An old uncle has departed this life, and left her fifteen thousand a year and a place in Surrey."

"The deuce he has!" exclaimed Ralph, a look of blank dismay replacing his former self-satisfied expression. "Why on earth did she tell you, and not me, I wonder?"

"You were otherwise engaged, my dear fellow, and women always confide in me somehow."

This was a fact. Lionel Carlton, in spite of his cynical tongue, was very popular with the opposite sex. He was not a marrying man, and they knew it, and it was perhaps for that very reason that he was on such confidential terms with so many of its members.

"How queerly things turn out!" muttered Ralph, half to himself, as he mentally cursed his precipitation in hurrying on matters with Eva. "Why——"

"She is better off now than Miss Wallace," put in Carlton, as if in completion of the sentence, while he watched his companion closely with a somewhat malicious gleam in his eyes.

Ralph roused himself, warned by the note of suppressed amusement in Carlton's voice. "Well, she deserves it all," he said defiantly, "for a better little woman does not walk the earth. Oh, is this your way? Well, good-bye, old fellow! see you to-morrow, I daresay." And the aspirant to Eva Wallace's hand and fortune hailed a passing hansom, and drove back to the barracks in a distinctly unenviable frame of mind.

### III.

"'Yes,' I answered you last night ;

'No' this morning, sir, I say.

Colours seen by candle-light

Will not look the same by day."

*E. B. Browning.*

"You have something to tell me, Eva?" said Mrs. Glyn, as soon as the door had closed upon their visitors.

Eva Wallace sank languidly into her favourite chair and unfurled her fan.

"Did Captain Kerr unburden himself to you during your *tête-à-tête* by the window?" she asked.

"He told me you had made him very happy, and I congratulate you both sincerely," replied Ruth, her face flushing as she spoke.

"Do not be too ready with your congratulations. He seems to have omitted the most important part of the affair; I told him I

must have at least a fortnight to consider the matter in." Mrs. Glyn gazed blankly at her friend.

"No; he never told me that, certainly. He seemed quite sure. Why, Eva, what has come over you? You spoke very differently yesterday."

"I was in another mood then. I have taken a leaf out of your book, Ruth, you see. I do not know how it is, but I don't feel as certain of myself as I did before. Matrimony is a risk, and I never feel quite sure of Ralph Kerr once the glamour of his presence is removed."

"Is it fair to him?" asked Ruth quietly.

"That is his look-out," retorted the other. "I would have said 'No' at once to him to-day, only he pleaded for another chance, so I gave him one. How it will end, Heaven knows? Do not look so serious, Ruth; you take life far too earnestly. There is the dressing bell—*au revoir!*" And she ran lightly from the room.

Some five hours later, while Eva Wallace was enjoying her beauty sleep, Mrs. Glyn was sitting by the open window, gazing out upon the moonlit river, and revolving in her mind the events of the day.

She had long ago made the discovery that her friendship for the handsome dragoon was really love, under one of its favourite disguises, but, notwithstanding this fact, or perhaps on account of it—some women are fashioned that way—she had done everything in her power to bring about his marriage with Eva. Now, the situation was becoming a trifle complicated. By a freak of fortune she was transformed into an heiress, and it was she whom he preferred; yet he had that very day, acting upon her advice, spoken the words which would raise an insuperable barrier between them. It was true that Eva's final decision had not been spoken, but Ruth felt convinced that her hesitation was merely coquetry. She would accept him of course, and it was so easy to deceive oneself; perhaps after all Eva's beauty had won Ralph away from his old allegiance. Men were like that, she knew. And, with a sigh, she left the window, and spent the remainder of the brief summer night, tossing restlessly from side to side, and longing for the dawn.

There were no traces of anxious thought or sleepless hours about Eva Wallace when she made her appearance in the breakfast-room the next morning. She looked radiant in a dainty frock of the palest blue, with fluttering ribbons, and wore the air of one who, having made up her mind upon an important subject, was consequently at peace with all the world.

"Coming into a fortune does not agree with you, Ruth; that is very certain," she remarked, scrutinizing her friend's pale face and heavy eyelids with the frankness of intimacy.

Ruth smiled indifferently, and busied herself with the bubbling urn. She felt at odds with life on this glowing June day, and Eva's

self-complacency and evident satisfaction with things in general added the last strain of irritation to her over-wrought nerves.

"Is Ralph Kerr coming here this afternoon?" she inquired presently, breaking a silence which had lasted for several minutes.

"Well, I told him not to come for a fortnight," replied Eva demurely, "but I should not be surprised if he turned up to-day."

"Oh, he is sure to!" said Mrs. Glyn listlessly. "And if he does, what shall you say to him?"

Eva hesitated, and glanced curiously across the table at her hostess's downcast face. Then she smiled mischievously.

"If he has the audacity to come, in spite of my commands on the subject, I shall punish him by giving him my answer at once. I have made up what I am 'pleased to call my mind,' so I may as well——"

"And that will be——" put in the other quickly.

Eva laughed gaily. "Oh, he must be the first to hear it, whatever it is. There shall be no rehearsals. Now, I am not going to bother you this morning, Ruth; you look worn out with excitement at your newly-acquired wealth. Do rest quietly, you dear old thing; I shall take my book into the garden," and, with a caressing pat on her friend's shoulder, she left the room, humming an air from "Carmen."

"That is finished," muttered Mrs. Glyn to herself, as she rose and walked to the window. "I knew she could not resist him. Now, I must pull myself together, and be sweet and sympathetic to them both—in raptures with my success as a matchmaker, and delighted with my heiress-ship. It is fortunate that acting comes so easily to us women," and, with a bitter little laugh at herself, she proceeded to harangue the cook concerning the important subject of dinner.

It was about five o'clock, when, notwithstanding Miss Wallace's injunctions, Captain Kerr arrived upon the scene, and discovered Ruth and Eva ensconced with a supply of light literature in a shady corner of the garden.

By this time, Mrs. Glyn had recovered her equanimity, so it was with her usual bright manner that she greeted her visitor, and after a few commonplace remarks, left him *tête-à-tête* with her friend, saying she had an important letter to write, and would order tea to be brought out in half an hour.

When she returned at the end of that time, however, Captain Kerr was conspicuous by his absence, and Eva was lying back in her hammock, languidly fanning herself, and apparently quite at her ease.

"Where is Ralph, Eva?" inquired Mrs. Glyn, with a feeling of half hope, half fear, tugging at her heart-strings.

"Gone!" answered her friend laconically.

"Well—but why? What does it all mean? Surely you——"

"Do be calm, Ruth!" murmured Eva pathetically. "It is so warm. Captain Kerr has gone because my final answer was unfavourable. I don't trust him, and I am not going to marry him, and there it is in a nutshell. Now, do let us have tea."



"Eva!" exclaimed Ruth indignantly, her brown eyes flashing with anger. "You cannot be so heartless as you pretend? You are in love with Ralph Kerr all the time, but some foolish notion has got into your head about——" Here she paused, as if uncertain how to complete the sentence.

"There are no foolish notions in *my* head," replied Eva significantly. Then, with a sudden change of tone: "Do not let us quarrel about Ralph Kerr, Ruth dear; he is not worth it. Women are seldom deceived in their instincts, except, perhaps, when they care about the man concerned, and I tell you that, like the village shop, all his 'best goods are in his windows.' There is a glamour about him, I grant you, but that is all, and he is not breaking his heart about me, I am convinced."

"You honestly don't love him, Eva?" said Ruth eagerly.

"I honestly don't!" And with a saucy glance at her friend: "I think I may hope for a better prize in the great lottery than a penniless dragoon, whose face is his fortune!"

Ruth gave a little sigh. "Poor Ralph. It is hard lines for him, but you cannot help it if you do not care about him," and then, with the guilty consciousness of acting a part, she flushed rosy-red, and turned aside to devote her attention to the tea-tray.

#### IV.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!  
Oh, the little less, and what *worlds* away!"

*Browning.*

It was in a very divided state of mind that Ralph Kerr returned to town after his interview with Miss Wallace. His vanity was piqued at her uncompromising refusal and evident indifference to his many charms; but, at the same time, whatever heart he possessed was in Mrs. Glyn's keeping, and, by a miraculously lucky chance, she was now an heiress too.

What would be his safest card to play, he wondered, as he turned into the mess, and ordered a soda and brandy to steady his nerves. Total ignorance of her fortune? Yes, by Jove, that would fetch her! Fond as the little woman was of him—so ran his thoughts—she had fathomed his calculating character, and, indeed, it was through her instrumentality that he had endeavoured to advance his prospects in life by a marriage with Eva. Yes, that was the *rôle* he would adopt in the coming scene. Pure disinterestedness, and an overwhelming affection which would brave poverty itself for the sake of the beloved object. Dear little Ruth! He really was awfully fond of her; she was such good company, and they would have such a good time together, now that the "love in a cottage" part of the affair was out of the question. It would not do to precipitate matters, however; he

must sacrifice a little time to conventionality. Eva Wallace was leaving in a day or two, so she had told him, and then, when the coast was clear, he would go and plead his cause. No fear of a rejection this time.

Some ten days later, as Mrs. Glyn was sitting alone in her favourite position by the open window, overlooking the shining river, Captain Kerr was announced.

"Ralph, this is good of you! What has become of you this long time? Why did you not seek out your old friends in your trouble? That is just the time when they can be of use."

He made no reply for a moment, but took both her hands in his, and gazed down into her eyes with that look in his own which he had always found so effective with women.

"Surely there is no need of acting between you and me, Ruth?" he said gently. "Miss Wallace has refused me, and I thank Heaven for it. I was mad to imagine I could endure the bonds of a loveless marriage. And now, Ruth—now, my darling, we can be happy together."

Mrs. Glyn flushed crimson, and made a vain attempt to release her hands from his close clasp.

"You know I have loved you all these years," he continued in that low musical voice, which had done him yeoman's service in many a similar scene. "Loved you unconsciously perhaps, thinking that it was merely friendship I felt, and now I cannot live without you. We shall be poor, but"—with the heroic air of one who sacrifices everything—"what does that signify if we love one another?"

"Suppose Eva had accepted you, as we both thought she would?" said Ruth, nervously, glancing up at him.

"I should have found some excuse for regaining my freedom," replied Ralph boldly. "She is a fearful flirt, and would have given me plenty of opportunities; or I should have treated her so coldly and indifferently that she would soon have thrown me over. Anyhow, that is over. I am free now, if you will accept me. There are lots of richer fellows after you, I know, but not one who loves you as I do," he ended, taking refuge in that well-worn phrase. "Speak to me, Ruth! tell me you will be my wife."

Still Mrs. Glyn remained silent. Her mind was in a whirl which rendered her speechless for the moment. The glamour of Ralph Kerr's presence was upon her, and she had lately imagined that she loved him, but her quick woman's ear had detected a false ring in his impassioned words, and she could not bring herself to submit altogether to the spell exercised upon her by his personal magnetism. Yet, on the other hand, he must be honest in his affection, for neither she nor Eva had ever told him of her fortune, and she fancied somehow that Mr. Carlton would not betray her; so Ralph was evidently prepared to renounce all hopes of finding another heiress, for love of her—the penniless widow!

"This is very sudden," she murmured at last, and then paused abruptly, as, at this inopportune moment, another visitor made his appearance.

"You, Mr. Carlton!" she said, woman-like recovering her self-possession at once, and greeting the new arrival with a smile, while Kerr cursed his bad luck, and mentally consigned his friend to the hottest corner of an unmentionable spot.

A gleam of amusement came into Lionel Carlton's eyes as he grasped the situation into which he had intruded himself.

"You here, Kerr? I pictured you on duty to-day, earning your pay for once."

"Fortescue took it for me," answered Ralph, in a distinctly sulky tone of voice, as he went over to the window and drummed impatiently on the glass.

"What's up?" reflected the other, beginning a flow of ready small talk with Ruth, who aided his efforts in her usual lively manner. "Kerr is in a devil of a temper and wishes me further, but the widow seems rather relieved at the interruption."

"I was surprised to find you still here, Mrs. Glyn," remarked Carlton presently. "I was afraid you would have gone to Surrey to take possession of your ancestral halls, and all that sort of thing."

Here Kerr turned round hastily, and shot a deadly glance at the speaker.

"Confound the fellow, he will spoil it all now. What a fool I have been!" he thought. "I should have confessed I knew, and then renounced all pretensions to her hand dramatically."

"I am off now, Carlton," he said hastily, before Mrs. Glyn had had time to answer. "Will you come with me?"

"No, thanks, my dear fellow," drawled the other. "But don't wait for me; you know the old proverb?"

"When do you go to Surrey?" he continued, regardless both of his friend's mental anathemas and the beseeching look in Ruth's eyes.

"Oh, I do not know!" she answered evasively. "My plans are not settled yet. Where will you spend the autumn?" she added, with an evident desire to divert the current of his thoughts.

"Oh, with my people in Scotland, I suppose; unless"—with a laugh—"you invite me down to Woodlands! Have you ever seen Mrs. Glyn's place, Kerr?" he inquired maliciously, guessing the reason of his friend's distaste for the subject under discussion.

"What place?" stammered Ralph, feebly. "I don't know what you mean."

"Why, is it possible you have forgotten! I told you all about it on our way home after our last pleasant visit here. It was no breach of confidence, was it?" he went on, turning to the widow, whose colour had suddenly faded, leaving her as pale as death.

"Not at all," she answered coldly. "You will have some tea, won't you, Mr. Carlton?"

"Not for me, thanks, I must be off. Are you coming or not, Kerr? Good-bye, Mrs. Glyn," and he took his departure, leaving the other to follow his own devices.

Ralph, with a hopeless feeling that the game was up, left the widow, and prepared to follow his tormentor. "I may come to-morrow, may I not, Ruth?" he murmured, taking the limp hand she offered him.

"No—don't come," she said quickly, "I will write. There, Mr. Carlton is waiting outside for you." So, with an eloquent glance, expressive of undying devotion, he left the pretty little drawing-room a sadder and wiser man than when he had entered it an hour ago.

Ruth remained standing in the middle of the room, with a dazed look on her white face. That dream was over! What a fool she had been to imagine him disinterested, and—yes—how lucky it was that Mr. Carlton should have arrived just when he did to undeceive her. Then, in an instant, in one of those sudden moments of self-revelation which come to us all occasionally, it flashed upon her that her sentiment for her handsome playfellow had never been love, in its truest sense, and going over to her writing-table, she wrote him a few brief lines, thanking him for the honour he had done her, and declining his generous offer to brave poverty for her sake.

A few weeks later, the society papers announced the engagement of Miss Wallace to Lord Mowbray, a paragraph which was read with disgust by a disconsolate dragoon at Hounslow, who had recently experienced the truth of that proverb which says that "between two stools one may fall to the ground!"

And Mrs. Glyn? you ask. Another year went by, and when she really met her fate and was supremely happy, as she deserved to be, she felt what a lucky escape she had had from marrying the wrong man.



## OUT OF SEASON.

THE season at Beachgate is in the height of summer. At other times however brightly the sun may shine, however diligently the band may play, however many people may pace the parade to its strains, we remain neglected by the fashionable stranger, and the trade of the lodging-house and the boarding establishment languishes. Therefore, late in November it was exceptionally lucky to secure, as Miss Stubbs did, two visitors at once.

It was not, however, to good luck that Miss Stubbs ascribed this preferment, but to the reputation acquired by her house, superior to all others of its kind in Beachgate, alike in the quality of its food and of its company.

The last pretension seemed justified in this especial case since both our boarders belonged to the aristocracy. Neither of them boasted a title, the one being simply addressed as Miss Carlington, the other as T. Martin, Esq.; but Miss Stubbs after some research discovered that the lady was niece to an honourable, and the gentleman the head of a county family.

One only regret marred her complete satisfaction; their stay would be so short; an arrangement not merely obviously disadvantageous to her, but less obviously so to the reputation of the place. For the air of Beachgate, so she declared, because of its super-excellent and beneficial quality, invariably began by making new-comers, especially if delicate, decidedly and uncomfortably unwell, so that if they retired before this discouraging commencement had been worked through, it was with a false and unfavourable impression of the climate!

Though the arrival of our guests took place on the same day, by no means so did their notification thereof. Weeks before he appeared, Mr. Martin's visit was prefaced by a long correspondence with Miss Stubbs whose part so far as composition and caligraphy went was performed by myself, in my newly-acquired post of secretary, assistant-housekeeper, and general help. He began with a long list of questions concerning the place and the house, and finished with an equally long string of directions as to his special requirements. All this I read and answered with the zeal and interest of the proverbial "new broom"; but Miss Stubbs was weary of this elaborate prelude before it was over, and more than once exclaimed impetuously, "that she wished the man would come and be done with it."

A pleasing variety was therefore afforded by the lady visitor's entrance upon the scene. On Monday by a telegram—answer prepaid—she inquired if a room could be ready for her on Tuesday,

and next informed us by a letter received on this same Tuesday that she would be with us at five o'clock in the afternoon in time for tea; finally appearing without her luggage after ten o'clock when everyone save Miss Stubbs had gone to bed.

In the meantime on that very afternoon Mr. Martin arrived with all his luggage—and his wits—about him at the time he had settled at least a fortnight before, and he joined us for the first time at dinner. He was slight, refined-looking, and a trifle sallow; middle-aged from Miss Stubbs' point of view, old from my own. In reality he was forty-five. On both, his exquisitely tranquil and gentle manner made the most agreeable impression, though I secretly wondered how at the pace at which he spoke he generally found time or opportunity to finish his sentences.

He entered the breakfast-room next morning at the first stroke of the breakfast hour, and after a light repast that, owing to his deliberation, was long as it was light, he withdrew, explaining that his programme for the day was a visit to Westpoint and lunch at the Bungalow.

"Well!" cried Miss Stubbs afterwards in tones of mingled impatience and admiration, "I thought he never would have finished his toast and butter! But he will be no trouble; as regular as a grandfather's clock. I am afraid our lady will prove just the opposite. Pray, does she mean to keep her bed all day?"

But soon after lunch Miss Carlington was deprived of an excellent excuse for so doing by the delivery of her luggage, whose temporary disappearance seemed partly explained by the fact that beyond a quite undecipherable monogram, it bore nothing in the shape of name or direction.

Accordingly about tea-time she entered the drawing-room in such a gown as I had never before seen or even read of except in the columns of ultra-fashionable papers. So dazzled was I by this wondrous "confection" of lilac silk and creamy lace, that only in the second place was I able to note how well it became the fair-haired wearer. She looked comparatively young and absolutely pretty, a feat inconceivable to me at that time on the part of any woman over thirty. Long over thirty had been Miss Stubbs' assertion, but then it was only a guess.

But according to her own account of herself Miss Carlington was suffering from a cold, which also seemed incredible, her appearance considered. Of this disorder and its progress she gave, during tea, a more entertaining account than those usually confided by invalids of their disorders, picturesquely detailing the various rash actions by which she had made it worse, and the equally various remedies by which her relations had dosed her to make it better. So engrossed were teller and hearers alike by this amusing story that Mr. Martin's entrance remained unobserved with, for consequence, a deplorable catastrophe.

"I became so sick of it," she was saying, "that I determined



all of a sudden one afternoon to come here. I telegraphed at once, before there was time to change my mind or have it changed for me, and I came off next day in quite a scramble. I looked up my trains on the way to the station, and am afraid I got a little 'mixed' over them! However, I always do everything in a rush or——"

It was at this point that glancing upwards and being startled, no doubt, by the unexpected sight of a gentleman standing beside the tea-table, she gave a little exclamation, and with a slight start upset her teacup, distributing its contents over the delicate silk of her gown.

She seemed paralysed by dismay, for she made no attempt to repair the mischief, and it was Miss Stubbs and myself who flew to the rescue with pocket-handkerchiefs and hot water. As to Mr. Martin, though evidently full of concern, even to the length of turning remarkably pale, it was not till the stains were removed and the cup refilled that he asked if he could be of any use.

Thus recalled to a sense of his presence Miss Stubbs introduced him with the not uncommon formula :

"Miss Carlington, I don't think you have met Mr. Martin."

"Not for a long time," was Miss Carlington's somewhat unexpected reply, as she bowed. "So long, Mr. Martin has probably forgotten my existence."

Mr. Martin with his usual deliberation accepted the chair, the cocoa and the biscuit proffered by Miss Stubbs before he responded in his slow, studied way :

"I never forget."

But here the dialogue ended and neither showed any inclination to resume the interrupted acquaintance.

At dinner-time Miss Carlington had recovered the shock of the accident and maintained a very lively conversation with Mr. Martin, who, on his side, furnished only the inevitable rejoinders to questions and remarks concerning mutual friends and acquaintances. As these were evidently people of social importance, the conversation, though dull to me, much gratified and edified Miss Stubbs.

She was especially pleased with Miss Carlington's fluency and animation, and wondered why she had never married.

"And such spirits she has too. I should think she did not even know what depression was."

It was a singular commentary on this verdict, that, when that evening I was mounting to my bed-room under the roof, I heard distinctly through Miss Carlington's closed door the sound of stifled sobbing.

But when I related this to Miss Stubbs next morning, her unromantic explanation was that Miss Carlington was only blowing her nose ; her cold having been so much worse she could not come down to breakfast.

By dinner-time, Miss Carlington had recovered sufficiently to join us, but not to take the leading part in conversation she had done the night before; and we should have been a very silent party save for Miss Stubbs' industrious attempt "to keep us awake," as she herself would have called it. But only at dessert did she succeed in distinctly rousing her guests by an appeal to Mr. Martin. She finished a wonderful story of constancy or inconstancy by saying she trusted he was not one of those who called women fickle.

Mr. Martin's rejoinder, when it came, like all his rejoinders, after some delay, was everything the present company could desire, at least in the beginning.

"I am very far from thinking," was his decision, "that inconstancy is the besetting sin of women."

Miss Stubbs heartily applauded at what appeared to be a full stop, but Mr. Martin, in time, continued:

"I should say that the conduct attributed to change of feeling was often due to their being misunderstood and supposed to have reciprocated affection by which they were only flattered. In short," was Mr. Martin's gratifying conclusion, "I am inclined to think that they are cruel, not so much from fickleness as from vanity."

In the cries of dissent and reproach which greeted this statement, Miss Carlington was very far from joining; but not—as was presently evident—from any lack of resentment, for no sooner was "order restored" than she observed:

"The besetting sin of men is their way of attributing their own particular vices to women, and the incredible meanness with which they try to throw on them the blame of their own heartlessness."

The remark, in itself, was fair enough as a playful rejoinder, but the real—not feigned—indignation with which it was uttered, and the personal feeling it seemed to express were so marked, that I was not surprised when Miss Stubbs suddenly observed that it was later than she had thought, and proposed an immediate adjournment to the drawing-room.

"What did it mean?" I inquired, when we were alone together.

"The air, only the air," observed Miss Stubbs, with grim resignation. "I always tell you so. It upsets the liver, and, of course, the temper, to begin with."

Under these circumstances I thought it very judicious of Miss Carlington to keep her room all next day, and admired the gloomy but inoffensive silence under which Mr. Martin concealed his irascibility.

After two days a benign change took place in the weather, and Miss Carlington was persuaded to try exercise instead of seclusion for her cold. With me in attendance she was to go for a turn on the parade during the sunny time that the élite of Beachgate marched to and fro thereon to the strains of the band.

As we passed through the hall, Mr. Martin came out of the

dining-room in time, without being observed, to see Miss Carlington, and as his eyes followed her thoughtfully, I wondered if he noticed the dejection of her looks and her carriage.

But these revived a little as we reached the Parade, and no wonder ! It was one of those astonishing days with which November sometimes rivals, nay, even surpasses June. The air was balmy and warm, the sky vividly blue, the waves sparkled diamond wise in the sunlight : and against this bright perspective, the flower girls on the stone tiers and steps beside the sea displayed huge posies of autumnal flowers, in shades of amber, pale gold and sombre crimson.

After a few turns, we took our places on one of the few unoccupied benches and were presently joined by Mr. Martin. He carried a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums and a spray of the pale but precious roses peculiar to the season. The first he presented to me ; the second he offered timidly to Miss Carlington. Will she refuse them ? was my unspoken conjecture. No, to my relief she accepted them with a bow, but with nothing more. So far encouraged, Mr. Martin took his seat beside us, and then followed a silence which I thought equally ungenial and inappropriate.

For the whole bright scene before us, and the strains of the band in the distance formed a background for something better than conventional stiffness. In fact, I felt wistfully that to be in complete harmony with such surroundings I should have sat between two lovers.

I observed in desperation that it was an exquisite day. Miss Carlington assented to this profound remark, and Mr. Martin made it the occasion for another.

"It reminds me," he said, tracing figures with his stick upon the gravel before us—"it reminds me of Headington Weir."

The name impressed me, and quite as much from curiosity as from politeness, I asked eagerly what Headington Weir was like.

"It is very lovely. At least I always remember it as the loveliest spot I ever stayed in, but I am a poor hand at descriptions. I daresay Miss Carlington would tell you far better than I can what it is like."

"It is a small place on the banks of the Thames," responded Miss Carlington, in a tone as dry as her remarks ; "it consists chiefly of villas, with gardens going down to the edge of the river. I don't know that it is prettier than most of these places."

The momentary pause followed, by which Mr. Martin's slightest replies were preceded.

"Then it must be association that makes me think it lovely. I was extremely happy when I was there."

Another slight pause, and then, still more interested it would seem in the arabesques on the gravel, he went on :

"Perhaps Miss Carlington was not ?"

"No," came Miss Carlington's answer instantly and sharply ; "I

was very unhappy. At least," she added, catching herself up, "at least I should have been if I had not been very much mistaken."

"Ah, that was just my case!" said Mr. Martin, but in a much milder tone. "It was while I was mistaken that I was so happy. The delusion was so delightful, while it lasted, that even now I find myself looking back to it and wondering if it was only a delusion."

I sighed irresistibly.

"This bores you, Miss Rayner?"

"Oh, no—no indeed!" I truthfully exclaimed. "But it is—please excuse me—so very tantalising to hear little bits of what sounds quite like a story!"

"It is a story—a story in real life. A novelist would make a very pretty little romance of it, with a few alterations. The hero, for instance, would require to be made handsomer and altogether a more romantic figure. The heroine, on the contrary, could not be improved. She was beautiful and fascinating enough to figure in any novel."

He paused again and I cried:

"Oh please, Mr. Martin, do go on."

"Oh, but I am no novelist. I can only tell a story in the plainest and most prosaic way. However, this uninteresting hero I speak of met the charming heroine and fell as deeply in love as if he had been the most romantic of men. She was so kind and gracious to him that he ended—no doubt very foolishly—by hoping his love was returned in some measure. And this hope grew stronger and stronger till one day, one fatal day, Miss Rayner——"

"Oh yes, Mr. Martin, please don't stop."

"Well, one day he called, as he had been doing for weeks and weeks, at the pretty little house by the river. But for the first time the heroine was not at home. She was not likely to be at home again for some time, the servant explained, because she and the lady who lived with her had gone off that morning to go abroad, she understood. For how long? The servant did not know. Had she left any address? No. But she will write, the poor man thought, and he waited and waited, but the letter never came. Then he began to understand that she had never cared for him, and having become tired of his attentions had taken this way of escaping from them."

"How horrid of her!" I exclaimed with the rash judgment of youth.

"Horrid she could not be, but I think she was a little cruel. What does Miss Carlington think?"

Miss Carlington in the most unsympathetic way was looking through her eyeglasses at something so far to the right that her face was quite hidden from us both. It looked a little pale as she turned it again and gazed, not at us but at the sparkling sea.

"Well, really, if you ask me, I must say that if the hero was as dilatory as some people I have known, the heroine may very naturally

have imagined after all the weeks you speak of that she herself had been mistaken, and that he did not really care for her, but was merely amusing himself at her expense, and so hurried off to escape the humiliation of being trifled with any more."

For a long time we heard only the lap of the waves, the footsteps on the parade, the last hurried strains of a brilliant gallop. No word came from Mr. Martin. Even his diligent tracing on the gravel had stopped suddenly. He was evidently confounded by this simple explanation, and no wonder. To me its tone appeared almost brutally candid, seeing that Mr. Martin was plainly the hero of his own story.

At last with a long drawn breath he exclaimed :

"Is it possible that he can have been so misunderstood? She was the only woman he ever wished to marry."

He paused, then added in a different tone :

"She is the only woman he ever will marry."

"But," I was here irresistibly impelled to urge, "since it was only a misunderstanding, it may come right after all, the story may end happily——"

"If—if the lady would be more merciful," almost tremulously murmured Mr. Martin.

"And the gentleman more explicit," observed Miss Carlington flippantly, as, like all around us, she rose to her feet in acknowledgment of the well-known phrase wherewith the band closed its performance and dismissed the listeners.

"Well, how are they getting on now?" was Miss Stubbs' question, naturally suggested by our all three returning home together. "Better? I suppose so! The first effect of the air is wearing off, as I said it would, just as they are leaving. And of course they will never have a good word to say of the place."

But in this particular she was mistaken. When they left us, as, by a curious coincidence they did simultaneously to meet the same train, they spoke of their visit and its results with evidently heart-felt gratitude, whose depth, indeed, we never fully estimated till three months later when we read in a daily paper the announcement of their wedding.



## ANNO DOMINI.

I'm growing old, my darling! Year by year  
 My earthly garment rends a thread or two;  
 The glow is fading and the strength is frail;  
 Suns do not warm me as they used to do.  
 There is a "rift within the lute," alas!  
 The voice has lost the "ring" it had before;  
 The hand is feebler at the wonted task;  
 The foot has lost its "spring" upon the floor.

I do not think of days to come, my child,  
 Or weave the golden cords of daily bliss;  
 I only dream of happy days gone by,  
 And kiss my angels with a holy kiss.  
 They reach to me their nerveless shadowy arms,  
 And all my spirit quivers to embrace  
 My dear ones, radiant with the fadeless light  
 Of Heaven's calm glory on their face.

I'm very quiet now, my darling; all the fears,  
 The doubts and ceaseless questionings have fled,  
 The wild heart-longings for a clearer sight,  
 While here we dwell in mists, are dead.  
 I rest in peace—the peace that comes of faith,  
 That makes to simple child-like hearts so clear  
 The fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Christ,  
 Creating love, which "casteth out all fear."

The famished pilgrim craves a crust of bread;  
 The desert camel for "still waters" deep;  
 The captive lark a sunbeam and a sod;  
 The fevered patient for a dreamless sleep.  
 And so, as years go on and we grow old,  
 With feeble steps, weak hands, and fluttering breath,  
 There comes to us an aching void—a want;  
 God fills it—and we call it DEATH.

F. ROCHAT.





